Organization and Spontaneity

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The Theory of the Vanguard Party and its Application to the Black Movement in the US today.

Kimathi Mohammed

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2013

Updated Edition

New Introduction by Modibo Kadalie
Afterword by Matthew Quest

On Our Own Authority! Publishing
Atlanta, Georgia

Organization and Spontaneity

by Kimathi Mohammed

Second Updated Edition

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On Our Own Authority! Publishing.
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www.oooabooks.org
oooabooks@gmail.com

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Kimathi Mohammed's *Organization and Spontaneity*, a meditation on Black autonomy in the aftermath of the rise and decline of Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers, is a widely overlooked classic of the Black Power movement. This new edition endeavors not only to make Mohammed's remarkable pamphlet known and available to a new audience, but also seeks to shed light upon and expand the conversation that has grown around its legacies. For this reason, a few additional writings have been included in this volume.

First, a preface by Patricia Ann West offers some personal reflections on Mohammed's life and briefly introduces this updated edition of his writings, as well as the new historical analysis of our other contributing authors. Featured next is an introductory essay by Dr. Modibo Kadalie (author of *Internationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the Struggle of Social Classes*), who has often been cited by Kimathi Mohammed for his crucial involvement in the creation and distribution of this pamphlet. Dr. Kadalie's essay serves to contextualize Mohammed's writings with insight into the historical moment of the Civil Rights and Black Power era. The introduction highlights conflicting ideologies which speak to perennial questions of revolutionary politics. In posing these "vital questions of contemporary significance," Kadalie reveals that the movement for Black autonomy is necessarily a revolutionary movement opposed to capitalism and state power on all terms. Accordingly, Kadalie suggests that Black representation within "undemocratic" hierarchical institutions and electoral politics can be easily seen as the counter-revolutionary antithesis to the period's self-organized movements for Black freedom. Another of Kimathi Mohammed's essays, "Beyond Measure: C.L.R. James's Influence on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," has been newly edited and is published for the first time in this volume. This essay explores the political and philosophical thought of C.L.R. James, his influence on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and his lasting impact on the Black Power movement more broadly.

This volume also includes a critical essay by Dr. Matthew Quest (author of *In the Shadow of State Power: C.L.R. James, Direct Democracy, and National Liberation Struggles*) in the form of an Afterword. This selection illuminates Mohammed's political legacies by placing them in biographi-

cal, historical, and social movement contexts. Surveying Mohammed's creative and independent perspectives, Quest also examines the strengths and limitations of Mohammed's political philosophy and places each in conversation with new political dilemmas of the post-Civil Rights and post-colonial moment.

Such considerations and critiques serve to *enhance* and extend Mohammed's most relevant insights for our own place and time. Inquiring about the centrality of Black working class self-organization in the struggle for Black freedom is a crucial part of acknowledging how people of color have democratized American, Western, and World Civilization in ways that are still not widely understood. Still, transparent discussion of the dilemmas presented in these writings necessitates clarifying the limitations of past struggles and their politics in the hope that we can overcome both the deceptive adaptation of oppressive institutions and the obstacles to freedom we have at times imposed upon ourselves.

There are a few noticeable adaptations that have been made here to the text of Mohammed's original writings. Most significant among these changes is the inclusion of many new citations that provide source documentation for previously unattributed quotations, paraphrasing, and other content in Kimathi Mohammed's text. All of the new footnotes and citations have been attributed to the editor. These important additions, which have contributed to strengthening Mohammed's arguments, analyses, and observations, could not have been made without the help of the dedicated historians whose writings are featured here, alongside our author's.

In that spirit, this editor wishes to acknowledge Modibo Kadalie, Matthew Quest, and Patricia West for their time and effort given to this project and their continuing dedication to its best ideals. Additionally, Sarah Dasher deserves to be acknowledged for her technical and editorial assistance. Without the selfless assistance of these individuals, this project could not have come into publication. Of course, special gratitude is due to Kimathi Mohammed for his revolutionary life and ideas, which remain as radical and as relevant today as they were at their inception.

— Andrew Zonneveld
2013

PREFACE

If we could go back to the night of 14 February 2002 to change a tragic course of events, then Kimathi Mohammed (Stan McClinton) would be the author of his own preface. If we could go back to that fateful moment which resulted in his accidental death on the streets of his beloved hometown of Savannah, Georgia, then he would revise his own work in a post 9/11, war-torn, and revolutionized world. As destiny would determine, I am deeded the charge to prelude this reintroduction on behalf of Mohammed's son and grandson, Dedan Kinyatti McClinton and Dedan Kimathi McClinton. For years, an extant copy of *Organization and Spontaniety* sat displayed at our house in an antique china cabinet along with Kimathi's last pack of cigarettes, some of his books, and a favorite ink pen. Every time we would pass by the cabinet, questions would tug at and annoy us. What do we do with these things? Are the ideas in the pamphlet still relevant and interesting? But as destiny would also determine, Kimathi's writings would gain a second wind in this 21st century reconsideration. Appreciatively, the previously published *Organization and Spontaneity* by Kimathi Mohammed, along with a new posthumously published essay, have been revised, edited, and reflected upon by his comrade, friend, and fellow author Modibo Kadalie as well as by C.L.R. James scholar, Matthew Quest.

The interpretation of Mohammed's writings begins a new conversation in which many may find themselves actively and excitedly engaged. Kadalie and Quest approach Kimathi's work as scholars and activists with a firm ideological stance in support of direct democracy. Warning: These writings may appear argumentative and questionable to some readers. That is up to you, and you are invited to join in. Nothing pleased Kimathi more than a dialogue about C.L.R., Hegel, and the history of the working class. As you read this version for the first time, or if you are re-reading, look for evidence of Kimathi's time-tested epistemology for struggle and empowerment.

The re-publication of *Organization and Spontaneity* is a sign of the sustainability of Kimathi's enduring ideas and thoughts. While it is not my belief that Kimathi embraced a total rejection of party politics, the question as to how we reconcile his political writings with the 2008 election of the first African American president remains to be explored. Therefore,

this preface is not a rubber-stamp for every argument of the editors, but rather to introduce this new volume and its contents.

Kadalie and Quest (or Modibo and Matt as I call them) deserve kudos for their efforts in this project and for the courageous ideas put forward. I appreciate the talks I've had with Kimathi's friends, Dr. Cynthia Hamilton, Greg "2X" Kelley, and Akosua Kushindana over the past couple of years as this project developed. Rummaging through Kimathi's old papers also led me to connect with one of Dedan's godfathers, Maina wa Kinyatti, for whom he is named. They all helped me to realize the influence of Kimathi's fighting spirit and that it is about time to spotlight his work. This is only the beginning. I'm sure that Kimathi's late mother, Minnie McClinton, known to many of the comrades as mother, cook, and advisor, is also looking down with approval and pride.

Kimathi's untimely death was due to a misstep; yet ironically, he was always trying to head poor and working class people, no matter the race or nationality, in the right directions of life.

— Patricia Ann West
2013

INTRODUCTION

From One Generation to the Next:
The Enduring Legacies of Kimathi Mohammed

The two political essays that follow, "Organization & Spontaneity" and "Beyond Measure" by Kimathi Mohammed aka Stanley McClinton (1948-2002), were written during, and inspired by, the period in which the Civil Rights/Black Power (CR/BP) mass movement was beginning to come to an end. They represent, to a great extent, the continuation of a long ideological journey of a specific core of activists from that period. Like any arduous journey, some were lost along the way while other new cadre joined in and reinforced our continuing quest for a sharper perspective that would come to reflect more accurately the political essence of the struggle of African American laboring people specifically, and of laboring people more generally over the long arc of history. Many of us were closely associated with Kimathi Mohammed: Kofi Natambu, Greg "Malcolm 2X" Kelley, Belinda "Akosua" Good, Lawton K. "Nbusi Mtu" Jackson, Robert and Sandra Bright, Terry "Abdul" Johnson, Chui Karega, Ernie Boone, Cynthia Hamilton, Larry Simmons, Daryl Simmons, Akwali-Damu, Mike "Ali" Lotson, Maina wa Kinyatti, Patricia West, myself, and many others. Our collaboration began during the summer of 1969.[1]

These two essays came most directly from our activist work and the organic discussions that came from our direct involvement in the Black Power phase of the CR/BP mass movement. Therefore, these essays, in a very general way, spoke for us.

In this exposition when I speak generally of "us," "we," or "our generation," I will be placing emphasis upon the ideological similarity that characterized the political tendency that more or less bound a specific network

1 I first became aware of Kimathi Mohammed in the midst of my involvement in the Highland Park College Strike in April of 1969. I was a teacher there and fully supported the student strike. A group of activists came from Lansing, Michigan to give support to the strike. Stanley was not in the group, but they delivered a message to us from him. Then my name was Edward C. Cooper. He was Stanley McClinton. He shortly became Kimathi Mohammed. I became Modibo Kadalie. Our decision to change our names was independent of each other. Many activists were also changing their names during this period.

of activists together then or now. From this perspective I will try to sketch that historical moment as we saw it—the agreed upon approach that cohered us as a network or affinity grouping around Kimathi Mohammed throughout his life and times.[2]

During our teenage years we had witnessed and participated in the early sit-ins as foot soldiers. We watched the emergence of all manner of opportunist, petit bourgeois leaders with extremely limited goals within the context of their reformist visions and circumscribed agendas. We were dizzied by the rapid transformation of the struggle during the 1960s from a non-violent movement for public accommodation reforms to one resorting to massive, direct, violent confrontation within most of the larger urban areas under the banner of "Black Power." These actions called into question the basic unjust nature of the capitalist system as practiced in the United States of North America and throughout the world. The massive urban upheavals that punctuated the mid- and late-1960s threw up all manner of undemocratic hierarchical organizations in their wake. By 1972, these organizations of various stripes that continued to emerge represented to us a strong thrust by the Black petit bourgeoisie to actively assert itself as a social class, as it began to impose its conceptualization of the significance of this movement, which by this time was beginning to ebb. One thing was clear to us: it was that all of the self-creativity of the movement was being discredited as mindless "spontaneity" that needed to be organized, directed, and orchestrated. Interestingly, just at the point when these "organizations" were most active, the movement began to seriously stall. It appeared to some of us that the more these "organizations"

2 During the summer of 1969 a small group from the Peoples' Action Committee, a component of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (the League), went to Lansing to visit the Garvey Institute where Kimathi Mohammed was part of the leadership. There we met for the first time. During that first meeting we engaged in a long and far-ranging conversation. We discovered, among other things, that we were both from the Georgia Geechee Coast. He is from Savannah and I am from Riceboro. We both attended small, segregated secondary schools that competed against each other in sports. He attended St. Pius X, the Black Catholic school in Savannah. I attended Liberty County High School in rural Liberty County. We knew the same people and were aware of the same places. We were both draft evaders. But most importantly of all we shared a similar and unique brand of radical politics. It was the politics that linked us together for the next thirty three years until his sudden and untimely death after we both had moved back home. He died in our beloved Savannah in 2002.

intervened, the more inert the movement became.

OUR ACTIVISM

We were directly involved in the internationalization of the Black Power Movement. Specifically, we became a part of the development of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC),[3] which was formed after a major mass mobilization effort in Washington, D.C. in May of 1972. That mobilization in turn resulted in the formation of the International Coordinating Committee of the ALSC during a meeting at Malcolm X Liberation University in Greensboro, N.C. on July 26, 1972.[4] This was occurring on the heels of the Black National Convention in Gary, Indiana held March 10 through 12 of that same year. We were not involved in the Gary Convention, which we regarded as a meeting of opportunist Black leaders who were attempting to erroneously channel the energies of the African American mass movement into electoral politics. The radical rhetoric of the *Gary Declaration: Black Politics at the Crossroads*[5] notwithstanding, it was clear to us that the convening organizers saw elective office as the be-all and end-all of the struggle.

During the remainder of 1972 and the first half of 1973 we continued our involvement in the ALSC and our work on local issues—Kimathi, with a core cadre in Lansing around the Marcus Garvey Institute, and myself in Highland Park with the People's Action Committee (the PAC). In the late spring of that year we were called upon to participate in the North American Regional Planning Conference of the Sixth Pan-African

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3 For primary documents of the ALSC see Appendix B-14 through B-20 in Modibo M. Kadalie, *Internationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the Struggle of Social Classes.* (Savannah, GA: One Quest Press, 2000) 621-668.

4 Malcolm X Liberation University was a small independent Freedom School headed by Owusu Sadauki, the alternative curriculum emphasized African self-reliance and independent economic development. For an account of the brief history of the ALSC see Kadalie, "The African Liberation Support Committee and the Class/ National Question,"*Ibid.,* 222-245.

5 The actual statement adopted by the convention was: "The Gary Declaration: Black Politics at the Crossroads," *Ibid,* Appendix B-9, pp. 592-597. Also see a "Draft Document-For the National Black Political Convention: Outline For a Black Agenda/ Platform," *Ibid.,* Appendix B-10, pp. 598-605. This document was sponsored and circulated within the convention by The Institute of the Black World among other organizations. It enjoyed some support but was never adopted by the convention as a whole.

Congress (6thPAC). This Planning Conference convened at Kent State University on May 11-13, 1973.[6] At that gathering we introduced a resolution on the establishment of the science and technological institute from the floor of the main session. This resolution called for the engagement of the African working classes in the establishment of an Institute of Science and Technology on their own terms. It was designed as a working class response to an elitist institute sponsored by certain states that we regarded as neo-colonial and backward entities at that time. Our resolution called for something different than the reactionary conception of the Science and Technological Institute put forth by the conveners of the conference. An intense floor fight around this resolution followed. We fully expected the support of C.L.R. James because of his sponsorship and direct involvement in the Caribbean Unity Conference (CUC), which had met previously at Howard University in 21-23 April 1972. The CUC issued a document called *The Joint Declaration of the Organizations of the Caribbean Unity Conference.*[7] It contained a comprehensive indictment of all of the so-called "independent" Caribbean states as neo-colonial and reactionary. Interestingly, it said nothing about the political backwardness of the "independent" African states.

We nevertheless regarded our resolution and our vision of the Science and Technological Institute as a reinforcement of the position taken earlier by the CUC. After a long and arduous floor fight at the Kent State meeting, we were narrowly defeated. C.L.R.'s support was not forthcoming. We were greatly disappointed.

After the meeting, a small group of us including Kimathi, Malcolm 2X, other cadre from the Marcus Garvey Institute,[8] and several cadre from

6 "The Call for a Sixth Pan-African Congress," *Ibid.*, Appendix B-11, pp. 606-612, "Resolutions: Establish of Science and Technological Institute," *Ibid.*, Appendix B-13, pp. 616-620. For a detailed review of the organizing efforts as well as of the political posturing within the meetings and gatherings leading up to the actual 6th Pan-African Congress in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in June of 1974 see James Garrett, "A Historical Sketch: The Sixth Pan-African Congress," *Black Scholar,* March, 1975, and Kadalie, *Op.Cit.*, "Chapters 7,8, & 9," 246-356.

7 See *Ibid.*, "The Joint Declaration of the Organizations of the Caribbean Unity Conference," Appendix B-12, pp. 613-615.

8 The Garvey Institute was an independent Black organization in Lansing, Michigan made of a core of activists including Kimathi Mohamed, Malcolm Askia (a.k.a. Greg Kelly and Malcolm 2X), Nbuzi Mtu (Lawton K. Jackson), Akosua Koi (Belinda Good), Kofi Natambu and Gary Good, Kofi Natambu, Lawton K.

the PAC in Highland Park[9] met to assess the conference and our lack of effectiveness within it. Specifically, we were let down by C.L.R. James and his failure to support our efforts to address the role of mass self-organized motion in the forward movement of what we regarded as the Pan-African International Peoples' Struggle.[10] In that informal meeting[11] we agreed that we must soldier on in spite of the confusing action of C.L.R. in the planning efforts for the 6th PAC.

It was also clear to us that the African and Caribbean states were in control of the 6thPAC through their government's diplomatic corps and foreign relations staffs. This represented an attempt at the consolidation of the nation states controlled by Black ruling classes internationally in the midst of an ongoing wave of national liberation struggles—a wave which had not yet run its complete course. At that time, Southern Africa was still under indigenous white minority or classical Portuguese colonial rule. Within the United States a similar institutional consolidation of the African American petit bourgeoisie was taking place within an ongoing, yet waning, CR/BP mass movement. This is when and how the Congressional

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"Nbusi Mtu"Jackson, Sandra Bright, Cynthia Hamilton, and Mike "Ali" Lotson, among others. Initially, made up of students from Michigan State active in defining the meaning of Black Studies, it would become basically a community organization. The wing of the student motion that formed the Garvey Institute left the campus and involved themselves in the Black Control of the Black Community movement as it was manifested in the local Lansing Michigan community.

9 Much like the Garvey Institute, the Peoples' Action Committee of Highland Park evolved from a student activist organization involved in the leadership of the Highland Park Community College strike. The almost month-long strike was focused upon twenty demands almost all of which directly involved Black Studies issues. During the course of the strike organic bonds were formed between the local community, including the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and the students. The strike was an overwhelming success and the core of the student organizers along with some community activists and League cadre formed the People's Action Committee (PAC) of Highland Park, Michigan. Some of the core cadre were Akweli Damu (Marvin Montgomery), Bahati Damu, Michelle Jones (Makaba), Mwata Kahid (Donald Softly), Yaru Mogadishi (Joe Gorum), Ojori Osibisa (Bobby Thomas), Kesho Yvonne Scott, Ibn Hakim, and others. There were many others who participated in a study group which met every Sunday morning from January of 1970 through July of 1973.

10 This is the designation we often use to describe our shared international vision.

11 This meeting literally took place in a van in the parking lot at Kent State University after the planning meeting was adjourned on May 13, 1973.

Black Caucus was formed nationally and the new Black mayors, state representatives, and individual Congresspersons came to assert their authority over the politics of the Black community—the politics that initially emerged from struggles in workplaces and neighborhoods. Again, the Gary Convention represented a definitive part of that reactionary process.

On the heels of our effort at the Kent State meeting, we decided that a larger more formal conference should be called among our circle of activists to address this situation from our perspective. That conference was called and convened in Detroit on August 4 and 5, 1973.[12] It was called the First Spontaneity/Organization Conference (First S/O Conference). At the conference we were seeking to positively impact the struggle to define the nature of the radical political content as well as the historical significance of the CR/BP mass movement in its dynamic grassroots dimensions. We saw this as our primary political task. Though we fully intended to have a second conference, it never took place.

The first essay in this volume, "Organization and Spontaneity: The Theory of the Vanguard Party and its Application to the Black Movement in the U.S. Today," came from a presentation that Kimathi made at the First S/O Conference in August of 1973. It was later published as a pamphlet in the late spring of 1974 and thereafter circulated among a larger circle of activists than the various previous drafts had been. This essay was intended to be a clear shot across the bow of the many bureaucratic and elitist Black organizations trying to guide the mass movement straight into the arms of the American state and/or the corporate bureaucracy. Through expanded patronage, direct and indirect sponsorship, the local and national apparatus of the American capitalist state and many large capitalist multi-national corporate enterprises, were beginning to enthusiastically embrace, absorb, and consume Black organizations and leading individuals across the ideological spectrum in a wholesale attempt at almost total co-optation. CR/BP "negroes" were for sale and it seemed no reasonable or unreasonable offer was refused. The Black masses were actively being sold out right before our very eyes. It was then and still is an ugly thing to behold.

12 A record of this Conference see Akosua Kushindana (Berlinda Good), *Unofficial Minutes of the Spontaneity / Organization Conference*, Mimeo, August 1973, Lansing, MI. These recorded minutes were mailed to participants on August 14, 1973.

Activists of all stripes continued to call for more and greater "organization" which, in effect, meant greater and more comprehensive dependency and cooperation with the state or corporate sponsorship structures. In many instances, the corporations and the government would actually create African American CR/BP organizations and install their well-financed agents as authoritative functionaries that headed and directed them.

While "Organization and Spontaneity" does not make a definitive distinction between various types of "organizations," the main focus of its basic critique is the "political party."[13] We should keep in mind that the National Black Political Convention had just occurred the previous year—1972. The self-appointed reform minded leaders who convened this gathering were focused on electoral politics. They called for the organization of a Black Mass political party to extend what they regarded as the electoral potential of the African American vote. While such a party never came into being, the same general motion—as we can now see—went straight into the present day Democratic Party of Jesse Jackson, John Lewis, and Al Sharpton, along with the various Black congresspersons, big-city mayors, and state representatives, leading ultimately to the presidency of Barack H. Obama.

While we were aware of the obvious and overt opportunism which the Gary Convention posed, we were more concerned with the radical organized wing of the movement. We had witnessed the self-destruction of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW or the League) of Detroit and this was fresh in our minds. The League was an organization in which the cadre of the Highland Park PAC was active when the leadership of this local organization (along with other members of the Central Staff)[14] was purged by the Executive Board in a decision made on behalf of the main body of the League, which was at that time rushing head long into an attempt to transform itself into a "Black Marxist-Leninist vanguard party."

Prior to the purges, in a meeting of the Central Staff called by the

13 For a perspective on the political party in the activist debate during the early 1970s see Modibo Kadalie, *op.cit.*, 21-26.

14 The Central Staff included heads of all components of the organization, along with several regional organizers. This was the secondary leadership level of the organization, out of which the Executive Board (EB) was to be elected. This never happened.

Executive Board,[15] John Williams asserted that there was some contention about how various members saw what the League was. In this connection he stated that:

> ...some see the League as attempting to build a Black Vanguard Party, some see us as trying to build a multinational Vanguard Party, some think that we should run people for public office, some even think that we should be building soviets in the factories.[16]

While there were—to the best of my knowledge—no official minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board, it seems that the "building of soviets in the factories" was, to some degree, discussed in a very limited and distorted way. Nevertheless, this statement by a member of the Executive Board in an open meeting is mentioned here as evidence of the direct ideological influence of C.L.R. on the League.

It was shortly after this meeting that the purges took place in April of 1971 and became known as the Easter Purges.[17] Two months later, the League began to seriously fragment and shortly thereafter was no more. What was once the great promise that the League offered had suddenly become so much dust in the wind. "Organization and Spontaneity," therefore, is an unsympathetic analytical consideration of what was regarded at that time as the misapplication of the theory of the Leninist Vanguard Party to the Black movement in America on the part of the leadership of the League as well as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. But it was against the League that Kimathi directed his main blow.

As Kimathi points out in the second essay, "Beyond Measure,"[18]

15 The meeting took place on January 23, 1971. I was present at the meeting as a member of the CS, as head of the PAC, and a member of the Education Section of the organization. For an account of this meeting see, Kadalie, *op.cit.,* 216-217.

16 Modibo Kadalie, Notes from the Central Staff Meeting, (January 23, 1971) Unpublished.

17 The following cadre were purged: Ernie "Mkalimoto" Allen, Lorene "Imara Hyman" Small, Sonny Hyman, Zondalin Allen, Shola Akintola, Makeba Jones, and the present author, Modibo M. Kadalie.

18 Kimathi Mohammed, "Beyond Measure: C.L.R. James's Influence on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers." In Kimathi Mohammed, *Organization and Spontaneity.* (Atlanta: On Our Own Authoirty! Publishing, 2013).

C.L.R. gave two critically important lectures in Detroit on June 12 and 13, 1971, within a few months of the purges and in the midst of the drama-filled fragmentation of the League. Willie Gorman, a long time C.L.R. associate and important activist within the Facing Reality Group in Detroit was asked to chair the two lectures. Originally, Gorman and I had begun to plan a debate between C.L.R. James and James Boggs,[19] specifically on the question of the usefulness of the Leninist Vanguard Party as an instrument of the African American Struggle in North America. We even thought that the League might be interested in sponsoring such a debate. This, of course, could not happen because of the internal turmoil and general decline that was taking place at that time. We approached some of the people associated with James and Grace Lee Boggs (clustered around their headquarters on the east side of Detroit) about such a debate—they were not interested. So we were left with these two lectures.

Since C.L.R. had written his *Notes on Dialectics*[20] (NOD) and Willie Gorman had led a study group on NOD at the Facing Reality office the previous December and January, we thought that C.L.R.'s first lecture should be on the utility of the dialectic in creative radical political theory. Since many of the activists within the League—and within the Detroit area generally—had been reading Mao Tse Tung's *On Contradiction*,[21] we thought that C.L.R. could offer some clarity on philosophical method. This was to lead to the second lecture addressing specifically the relevancy of the Leninist Vanguard Party to North America. C.L.R. agreed to present the lectures on these topics in this order. Of course, the second lecture became more about revolutionary praxis. The first lecture would be, as most of us understood, less controversial than the second. The second lecture was politically charged because some of the members of the Executive Board of the League were present. Many of the purged were also there. C.L.R., in his usual fashion, began by posing some critical questions to his audience. The audience was, under the circumstances, tense and a deathly silence permeated the room. Consequently, he equivocated. We fully expected

19 See James Boggs, *A Manifesto For A Black Revolutionary Party.* (Philadelphia: Pacesetters, 1969).

20 C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel and Marxism,* First Edition, (Detroit: Friends of Facing Reality, 1966).

21 Mao Tse Tung. "On Contradiction" In *Selected Works,* Vol. 1, (Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1967). 331-345

him to condemn those in the League who were attempting to turn it into a vanguard party, explaining how they would fail. For whatever reason, he did not choose to address this burning question in a forthright manner.[22]

During the critical period of 1972 to 1980 there seemed to be literally dozens of leftist groups proclaiming themselves to be "Marxist-Leninist Parties" fragmenting and re-emerging with different names and leaderships and endlessly recycling themselves in a meaningless recapitulation of the same mindless ideological pronouncements and very circumscribed political praxis. The League was very much a part of the continuous fragmentation and disintegration of these Marxist-Leninist organizations.

"Beyond Measure," in its earliest drafted form, was a major topic of extended discussion at the First S/O Conference during the late summer of 1973. The essay itself went through many substantial revisions, appearing as a conference paper in 1993, and evolving with correspondence among Sandra Bright, Cynthia Hamilton, Martin Glaberman, Willie Gorman, and myself from 1993 to 2001. The version in this present publication appears with some editorial alterations as well as some minor updating as it was originally written circa 1976 and circulated within a selected cadre of activists thereafter, just as the first essay had been.

Taken together, these two essays represent an attempt by a small core of Michigan based radical activists who were playing a very central role in the CR/BP mass movement during the early 1970s to offer an analysis of the radical politics of the times from a unique outlook. Granted, the analysis itself was limited, but it did point us in the direction of a more comprehensive perspective of the politics of the present period, some forty years later. A lot has happened since then.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE ESSAYS

These essays are now considered by many to be classic works, because they give us definitive documentation of the existence of a cadre of activists within the CR/BP mass movement in the United States whose distinctive ideological perspective was directly influenced by the politics and philosophical writings of C.L.R. James. But more importantly, they are relevant to discussing certain vital questions of contemporary significance. This enables us to see how certain questions manifest

22 "Beyond Measure," the second essay of this volume, documents this episode.

themselves within particular periods of struggle among and between the various tendencies that are locked in necessary ideological combat rooted in radical activist politics. Ideological combat could be as unprincipled then as it can be now. But the suppression of political differences in the name of a "Black radicalism"—which in fact is unified with and, therefore, justifies reactionary political praxis to the point of deadly repression of the African American working masses by Black mayors, congressmen, police chiefs, and now presidents—is a far greater crime.

C.L.R. JAMES'S DIRECT INFLUENCE

On the direct influence of C.L.R.'s political and philosophical writings, "Organization and Spontaneity" takes up the question of "revolutionary" organization in a general way. It is most obvious that this essay is reliant to a great degree upon NOD. We read NOD in order to refine our method of thinking about revolutionary organization. Specifically, we were seeking to arrive at a better understanding of the relationship between the mass upheavals of the 1960s and more "conscious" organizations of the 1970s. That is why we called our focused meeting on this issue the First Spontaneity/Organization Conference. As this essay points out, within spontaneity there is organization. The essay, therefore, marks the beginning of a systematic attempt at the understanding of the concept of "self-organization" and "self-movement" of the masses in struggle. Our study and application of NOD led us to greater clarity regarding this fundamental social dynamic. It also reinforced within our activism a disdain for elitist and hierarchical forms of organization since they did not give enough credit to the most fundamental self-organization and self-movement of the masses.

It should be remembered that by the time we came into contact with C.L.R. James and his writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s he had been active and writing for almost four decades. During that time, he had developed and was continuing to evolve as a revolutionary theorist. NOD was indeed helpful on the one hand, but it created a dilemma on the other. In our studies of the Russian Revolution, we saw that the soviets emerged as the result of the relatively spontaneous self-movement of the workers in the midst of sharp conflict at a certain historical conjuncture. But the Leninist Vanguard party also existed at the same time. It was clear that by the late 1940s C.L.R. had surely developed a healthy disdain for

elitist and hierarchical forms of political organization, yet there does not appear to be a complete and clear break with Leninism. It is a debatable contention that, while C.L.R. had become clearly anti-Stalinist and even anti-Trotskyist for their advocacy of the undemocratic role of the vanguard party, he still did not see the critical role of Lenin's vanguard party in the destruction of the Soviets during the Russian Revolution.[23] Nor was it clear to C.L.R., at the time we encountered him, that Lenin did not fully appreciate—conceptually or practically—the significance of direct democracy. It is, therefore, obvious and unfortunate that Lenin and Leninism received a pass, even in C.L.R.'s later writings as well as in both of the essays contained herein written by Kimathi. Not only is Lenin not taken to task, but other heads of state, including Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere likewise never came under the critical scrutiny that C.L.R. was known to level against the nation state itself. In working on the 6thPAC, he seemed to be unable to fully appreciate the treachery of the state bureaucracies of the Black post-classical-colonial states. This is the great conundrum that C.L.R. never really seemed to be able to overcome. His offer of critical support to these Third World regimes presented a cruel paradox and tended to undermine his effective mentorship of radical youth. Because he did not fully break with these regimes, he therefore could not fully embrace all of the implications of Black working people's direct self-government. On the one hand, he would write extensively and accurately about the irrelevance of the nation-state, particularly the one-party state and the welfare state, and their impending collapse. But he seemed to be unable to critically examine the policies and practices of certain states and their leading statesmen. Instead, while he chose to be a fellow traveler with them, he often projected the historical self-mobilization of ordinary Black people into a fusion with these statesmen and their ideal of representative government. When C.L.R. did break relations with these regimes (for those paying close attention) it seemed he did so on the basis of a historical technicality, not on the consistent reality of the nature of these regimes as repressive of the self-movement of everyday people.

In "Beyond Measure" Kimathi states that:

23 See: Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control 1917-1921: The State and Counter-Revolution.* (Atlanta: On Our Own Authority! Publishing, 2012).

> He [C.L.R.] also proposed that the Garvey Institute enter into collaboration with Friends of Facing Reality to jointly reprint *Basic Documents on the Black Struggle* [BDBS] and *Notes on Dialectics*. James deemed these two documents key for...countering radical forces inside and outside the League that attacked Black nationalism on the grounds that from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism it was reactionary.[24]

Here we see the direct involvement of C.L.R. in the actual ongoing ideological struggle most particularly within the League itself. But even more importantly, he has chosen to align himself with the elements who are adherents of one brand or another of "Black nationalism." By reprinting BDBS in Michigan, and reinforcing it with the reprinting of his *A History of Pan-African Revolt*[25] in Washington D.C. at the same time, C.L.R. was becoming most influential among the various elements who professed to be "Black revolutionary nationalists." It is clear that Kimathi and C.L.R. were more concerned with those who desired to apply or misapply the elitist Leninist vanguard organization to the Black struggle in America than with those who called themselves Black Nationalists.

Contained within the documents of the BCBS we find this now infamous quote from 1948:

> The Black struggle, *the independent Black struggle* has a vitality of its own; that it has deep historic roots in the past of America and in the present struggle; it has an organic political perspective, along which it is traveling to one degree or another, and everything shows that at the present time it is traveling with great speed and vigor (emphasis added).[26]

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24 Kimathi Mohammed, "*Beyond Measure: C.L.R. James's Influence in Relation to the Dynamic of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers,*" Internal Document, Garvey Institute, circa 1976, 28.

25 See C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt,* (Washington, D.C: Drum and Spear Press, 1969).

26 The essay entitled "Marxism and the Race Question" (1947) appeared in mimeo graphic form within *Basic Documents of the Black Struggle* but also as C.L.R. James, "Marxism and the Race Question," *Black Spark Edition,* (Free Press: Montreal, 1971) 7.

This same passage continues:

> The *independent Black movement* is able to intervene with terrific force upon the general social and political life of the nation, despite the fact that it is waged under the banner of democratic rights and is not led necessarily either by the organized labor movement or the Marxist Party (emphasis again added).[27]

Without asserting that the "independent Black movement" is the motion of an oppressed nation or colony, which some were and still are openly advocating, C.L.R. established his credibility among certain Black Nationalists. There were those who simply advocated that Black people should organize themselves independently of the other layers of society. Within the second part of that passage it is clear that the nation of which he speaks is the United States.

In "Beyond Measure" we find the League described in the following manner:

> The League, as an *independent Black working class organization* calling into absolute question every American institution, thus, stood alone from the beginning of its existence (emphasis added).[28]

As such, the League was able to attract Black workers because it spoke directly to the essence of the independent Black movement in America and of this movement's critical role in the transformation of American society. A problem arose, however, when the leadership of the League attempted to turn the organization into a Leninist Vanguard party. Kimathi states that:

> They (the executive board of the League) were not well grounded in historical studies and the classical literature of critical theory, i.e. Marxism-Leninism, as evidenced by the attempt on the part of the executive leadership of the League to

27 *Ibid.*
28 Mohamed, *op.cit.*, 38.

> transform the organization into a vanguard party. They were not seasoned revolutionaries like C. L. R. James, who knew that the theory of the vanguard party belonged to a radically different world. It was a theory of organization formulated and advanced by Lenin around 1902.[29]

And by inference it could not be accurately applied to the independent Black movement in the US. This was the fundamental error of the elitist leadership of the League according to Kimathi. Most of us agreed with this most basic analytical conclusion. This led to all manner of undemocratic rigid practices within the organization and the creation of a bureaucratic hierarchy that enshrined the Executive Board and relegated the Central Staff and the rank-and-file to mere participants in the work of the organization. Oddly enough, those who were the strongest advocates for more internal democracy were also the most ardent supporters of independent Black organization—those that Kimathi called "the nationalists." Ironically, they were also the ones that favored a return to focusing on organization within the factory. Even though there were certain members of the Executive Board who represented this tendency, in particular General Baker,[30] most of the others were doctrinaire Marxist-Leninists. Baker himself was the most proletarian of the League Leadership, and must be singled out as a popular figure who had the most rank-and-file support.

According to Kimathi, it was decided by C.L.R.—in conjunction with cadre associated with the Garvey Institute and others within the Facing Reality collective—that the pamphlet *Every Cook Can Govern: A Study in Ancient Democracy*[31] (ECCG), which was a study of direct democracy in Ancient Athens, should be circulated in an attempt to bolster the democratic tendencies within the League during that time. I don't remember how effective this intervention was; I do remember that of those very

29 *Ibid.*, 37.

30 It has been mistakenly indicated elsewhere that "General" was a nickname. In fact, General Gordon Baker was the legal name of this actvist.

31 This work first appeared as: C. L. R. James, "Every Cook Can Govern: A Study in Ancient Democracy," *Correspondence,* June, 1956, Detroit. It has been since issued in many distinctive pamphlets and as sections on several collections among them: C. L.R. James, *The Future in the Present: Selected Writings,* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1977) 160-175. I first read it as a special edition pamphlet issued by the Facing Reality collective in Detroit dated 1959.

few who read *Every Cook Can Govern*, an even smaller number were impressed by the logic of it.[32] Many of those involved in various aspects of the actual work of the organization were simply calling for an implementation of the limited form of representative or participatory democracy called for in the governing documents of the League.

It can reasonably be said, from our present vantage point, that the general push for internal democracy within the League led to the Easter Purge. And that this was symptomatic of the organization's many other problems stemming, in a primary way, from its hierarchical organizational form. C.L.R.'s accurate critique of this type of radical political organization continues to be a prophetic reminder to us all. We are indebted to him for this useful critical insight.

VITAL QUESTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

In this ideological journey we now arrive at questions of contemporary significance that might be derived from the basic constructs within Kimathi's essays. We began our journey with some of the basic questions that were introduced within them. He points us toward a general analysis of the historical irrelevance of the nation state and the political party. He unequivocally asserts that the self-organization of the masses of working people is critical to any analysis of historical motion. Now we must go further, being more precise and specific as to the direction these notions might take us. Historically centering the self-organization of working people in this way takes us immediately beyond Leninism and the Leninist Vanguard Party. Although Kimathi never mentioned direct democracy, his essays lead us to a consideration of its general form and contours as es-

32 While the pamphlet described direct democracy within the context of the ancient Athenian city state, many "nationalists" saw the Greek city state as not only "European" and therefore irrelevant to the "African experience" but fundamentally a slave state as well. The only people who were legally involved in directly governing were a minority of people who were "citizens." The overwhelming majority of the Greek population which consisted of "slaves," "women," and "foreigners" were not "citizens" and were prohibited from involvement in public life. But, again, the lesson of the general lack of any kind of democracy within the League *was* reinforced by reading "Every Cook Can Govern." This showed a capacity by certain activists to draw conclusions from the best of past historical developments (while being aware of their limitations). This is what younger generations are doing in response to the strength and limitations of the League, which was by no means a perfect organizational formation.

sential imperatives for genuine self-emancipation of all oppressed classes and layers of classes within the capitalist social formations that exist today.

To its lasting credit, the League introduced to the CR/BP mass movement the concept of Black worker organization at the point of production—the factory floor. Although the League likewise never called for the direct democratic control by the self-organized workers from the point of production, its brief period of social activism allowed us to see that as not only a possibility, but a necessity for any real direct democracy to come into being. Expanding our conceptualization of a valid directly self-governed society by laboring people, we now should consider that there are other crucial points of social reproduction—from building independent institutions at the neighborhood level for judicial affairs, a people-to-people policy between self-governing extended communities, and democratically organized freedom schools, as well as accounting for mothers' caring work in places of residence with minor children and others who might require nurturing support and attention. The directly governed self-organized society must also include an ethically responsible, mutually integrated ecology that deepens our understanding of human society as an integral and dynamic part of the natural world.

It is clear that most of the essential political questions of these times revolve around the interplay between capitalism as an international economic system; the nation-state, in its neo-liberal welfare form, its pseudo-socialist state-capitalist form, or even its naked fascist form; and political parties as they operate within single-party or multiparty states. And since they all operate to maintain the exploitation and the oppression of working people everywhere, they all act to throttle the self-organizational aspirations and the social praxis of working people everywhere.[33] That is the most basic and fundamental conclusion from which we must launch an assault upon all forms of institutional hierarchical organizations as well as ideological conceptualizations based upon class, race, and/or gender that reinforce these forms of social organization about society and about the natural world.

33 Included within these reactionary forms of hierarchical organization are those who masquerade as revolutionaries, the leftist elitist vanguard parties who articulate their goal as the "revolutionary seizure of state power" and rule "for" the working class. They say that they want to seize the commanding height of "state power." They are the most dangerous charlatans.

We must be clear that "representative democracy," as opposed to direct democracy, is how the nation-state, which is the basic republican form of government, is organized. This undemocratic fraud substitutes the illusion of "democratic participation" in government in place of direct democratic workers' self-governance. "Participation" in government gives us a seat at the table of thieves as a permanent minority. That is why "serious revolutionary politicos," as Kimathi would say, must focus upon the development of effective politics that is "independent" and does not reinforce or legitimize the nation state or any form of representative democracy. This independent political path does not allow for any subordination to the reactionary politics of others. That, of necessity, includes the Democratic Party within the context of North America, as well as the various united front efforts and coalitions with reactionary African American officials or any other opportunists of the left or of the right.

It is accurate to say that within the present historical moment it is obvious that many former activists from the CR/BP period have been seduced by the implications of the often repeated mantra that "we have come a long way" and "my, how things have changed." And, on the surface, many things do appear to have changed, but the basic profound relations have not. American Conservatism's base, built upon the maintenance of a racially pure, male-dominant, mono-cultural regime, has given way to an American neo-liberal ethnically diverse, gender-equal, multicultural regime—a diversity that is present among those who rule above society. But we do not live in a new era. The capitalist state is still basically and most fundamentally the capitalist state in all of its critical and defining dimensions.

Frankly, for the reform-minded petit bourgeoisie and their fellow travelers, there has been no seduction. They sought only an inclusive capitalism and nation-state where they attained an increasing share of influence as managers and junior partners. That was and is the totality of their vision for the CR/BP movement. According to this vision, they "have arrived." Under the banners of Black Pride and Black Empowerment they have enriched themselves and suppressed the democratic majority of our community. Additionally, they have falsified our collective quest for liberation and misrepresented it as the result of the singular efforts of inspired, exceptional, elitist leaders from among their class who were the forerunners of the heinous regimes now acting illegitimately in the name of the

masses. They defend the "exceptional" American nation-state as legitimate in every way possible, including its imperialist designs throughout the world. This inaccurate historical narrative must be rectified.

As long as the petit bourgeois elite can convince the masses that the Democratic Party (with its advocacy of civil rights along with an array of regulatory controls within the context of a broader welfare state) is the only alternative through which the democratic emancipatory aspirations of working people can be channeled, there can be no realistic independent or new politics. That is what they are now attempting to do. Blacks and other people of color as well as women and white working class people are forced to fight over state policies against the Republican Party, which is seen as the principle institutional advocate of retrograde policies that predates the multicultural, ethnically diverse, and gender equal "new" American capitalist nation-state. Political debate, in this way, is restricted to argument about this or that state policy. Progressives, radicals, and self-styled revolutionaries all fall for it and try to take the working class with them. From Maynard Jackson, to Jesse Jackson, to Al Sharpton, to Cory Booker, to Barack Obama, in the final analysis they advocate the same vulgar reformist politics. Working people are asked to "participate" by voting within the context of the same narrow politics that imagine some fundamental distinction between the commentary of Fox News and MSNBC.

Generally, the capitalist state defines and circumscribes all legitimate political activity by and through partisan politics. It was from the practice of these narrow politics within the framework of institutions of representative democracy—the Senate and the House of Representatives—within the US that gave rise to political parties in the first instance. It is through the continued practice of these same backward politics that institutions of representative democracy continue to draw their life's blood. The struggle for direct democracy is, therefore, by definition an anti-state struggle. From this, it is easy to conclude a consistent theme within human social development: laboring people have been waging a collective independent struggle for self-emancipation on a relatively equal basis against many different forms of the state in many distinctive hierarchical social formations throughout history.

The fundamental message of this "independent" and new politics is that we must learn to effectively facilitate and expose the ongoing self-organization of the masses of working people against the state. Often this

self-motion is manifested in spontaneous and dramatic upheavals and at other moments it is almost imperceptible, but its independence has continuity and a definitive laboring class nature. There have been times, circumstances, and places within social formations that have existed in the past and present where working people have controlled the conditions of their daily lives. Not only have they controlled the direct material conditions of their lives, but they have managed to exert a substantial degree of control over the social relations which directly affect these conditions. "Serious revolutionary politicos" must learn to actively affirm, guide, facilitate and nurture this awesome drive toward complete and total self-emancipation by laboring people everywhere. In order to be effective at this general task we must develop a certain approach to social historical analysis that requires a unique sensitivity.

Clearly and most fundamentally, the politics of both C.L.R. James and Kimathi Mohammed call for the cultivation of a skilled political activist cadre who fully comprehend the implications of the ongoing struggle of working people toward direct democracy. This cadre must be able to effectively chronicle, guide, facilitate, nurture, and participate in the contemporary manifestations of this struggle. The skilled development of new, different, and dynamic methods and frameworks that seek to supercede all hierarchical social institutions will be the only means by which a world defined by direct democracy and ecological equality can prevail, where nothing or no one is superior to anyone or anything.

— Modibo M. Kadalie
2013

To Mzee C.L.R. James
and the revolutionary youths he has inspired and coached.

Special dedication To Mzee Roy S. Turner.
(August 26, 1915 - April 4, 1974)
"We Must struggle from one generation to the next."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This pamphlet is not the product of a single individual, although my name appears on the front cover as the person who wrote it.

Before this pamphlet was printed many politicals reviewed the various drafts and held meetings to resolve many controversial points. After much discussion and the refinement of various points, a consensus was reached among the politicals whose hands this pamphlet went through that it must be published immediately. Subsequently, the political grouping, which operates under the name Marcus Garvey Institute, began making arrangements for its publication.

It is not necessary to list all the people who were directly involved in some aspects of this pamphlet's publication. However, it would be a grave oversight if the name Ali (Mike Lotson) did not appear here. In fact, Ali must be considered the co-author of this pamphlet.

Modibo Kadalie must be mentioned here too because It was he who took the Initiative to circulate the drafts among politicals and organize sessions to discuss the content of this pamphlet in depth.

Then there was Damali Tiombe who actually spent more time getting this pamphlet in shape for publication than anyone else (including Kimathi Mohammed). She typed and edited one draft after another. She wrestled with various controversial points in the drafts and made sure that politics of this document did not get watered down in the process of collective thought and action. Without her assistance and those who worked along with her this pamphlet would probably still be an unpublished document.

— Kimathi Mohammed
1974

ORGANIZATION AND SPONTANEITY

The Theory of the Vanguard Party and its Application to the Black Movement in the U.S. today.

TWO PROPOSITIONS

The "organization question" is currently being heatedly debated inside the Black movement in the United States. But most debates on organization are usually very limited and narrow in scope—in addition to usually being very one-sided affairs. That is, most of these debates revolve strictly around certain aspects of creating a Black political party. Seldom does anyone ever come forward to articulate a position in opposition to the creation of a Black political party. Usually the debaters are in total agreement (with the fact) that a Black political party is necessary; so they don't have to argue about that. Instead, they argue over structural-functional problems which plague political parties in general.

Most of the current debates on organization are nothing more than fruitless academic exercises. They do not take us one step closer to a resolution of the "organizational question." If anything, these debates have further complicated matters and created more confusion inside the Black movement.

Two important considerations are always overlooked in the current debates. First, every revolutionary has had to have a base! Second, the old national form of organization with the "Central Command" dictating and directing every phase of activity has collapsed. These are the two propositions we must start with if we are going to seriously approach the question of organization.

The first proposition settles any bickering about the importance of organization. The second proposition spells out precisely what we must recognize. Together, these propositions take us a step closer to resolving conflicts around the type of organization that must be created to ensure the success of any revolutionary movement. By themselves, however they do not provide us with a sufficient understanding of our dilemma. That is why this document does not stop with the two aforementioned propositions.

Since a great deal of the current theoretical confusion and practical mistakes we are encountering stem from a misapplication of V.I. Lenin's theory of organization, the first section of this document will be an attempt to put Lenin's theoretical formulation into its proper historical context. After a discussion of Lenin and the Theory of the Vanguard Party, a discussion of spontaneity and organization follows; paving the way for our particular concern here—The Black Movement in the United States.

The last section of this document is entitled "What Must Be Done." Nothing more needs to be said about the context of this document; except, it is not an attempt to show that Lenin's theoretical formulation was incorrect. Like all revolutionaries, Lenin needed a base. Whether the Russian Revolution could have been completed without the creation of a Party is a matter to be shelved or pursued outside of the context of revolutionary struggle.

LENIN AND THE VANGUARD ORGANIZATION (PARTY)

Around 1902, Lenin formulated and advanced a theory of organization—the theory of the vanguard party.

Lenin was quite explicit about the type of organization that had to be built. First and foremost that organization had to be truly revolutionary.

> Lenin wanted a rigid narrow organization, with a highly centralized discipline. He wanted a strict division of labour inside the party, each member being responsible for a job of work with which he mainly concerned himself. The regulation of the party, he demanded, should be equally harsh. Under the regime of Tsarism formal democracy was impossible. He advocated democratic centralism. The Central Committee would be freely elected; whenever possible there would be free discussions, but once a decision had been taken it would have to be obeyed blindly.[1]

As far as Lenin was concerned, revolutionaries in Russia were "lagging" behind the spontaneous development of the working class movement. They were failing to undertake the new theoretical and practical

1 C.L.R. James, *World Revolution,* 1917-1936 Kraus Reprint, (Nendlen/Lichtenstein: 1970) 48-49

tasks which were being created daily by the creative political activity of workers. Lenin believed that ordinary working people were "capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and street battles with the police and troops." He also believed that ordinary men and women were the only ones capable of determining the final outcome of the revolutionary movement—"but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires professional revolutionaries." [2]

Lenin's concept of organization originated in Western Europe. The dominant form of political organization there was the political party. After studying carefully the development of the *World Revolution* and particularly the development of the revolutionary movement in Russia, Lenin took the party concept and boldly asserted that:

> 1) No revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity;
> 2) That the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organization, and the more solid the organization must be;
> 3) That such an organization must consist of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity;
> 4) That in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organization to people who have been professionally trained to combating the political police, the more difficult it will be to unearth the organization
> 5) The greater will be the number of people from the working class and from other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it.[3]

Two well known revolutionary personalities, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, disagreed strongly with Lenin on the question of organization. They argued for a much broader and loose organizational structure. Rosa Luxemburg, while voicing her opposition said:

2 V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done," *Collected Works* Vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1916) 450.

3 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works,* Vo. 5. 464.

> The ultra-centralism which Lenin demands seems to us, however, not at all positive and creative, but essentially sterile and domineering. Lenin's concern is essentially the control of the activity of the party and not its fruition, the narrowing and not the development, the harassment and not the unification of the movement.[4]

Rosa Luxemburg attacked Lenin's theory of organization without "sparing the rod," but she was very principled in her attack. One can't help but admire Rosa's ability not only to disagree with Lenin, but to also articulate and defend her position. As she engaged in theoretical and ideological struggle with Lenin over the question of the best form of organization she said:

> But the domineering spirit of the ultra centralism advocated by Lenin and his friends is not for them an accidental result of mistaken ideas. Rather, this project is related to Lenin's campaign against opportunism, which is carried through into the smallest detail of the organizational question.[5]

Rosa was absolutely correct when she pointed out that Lenin's struggle against opportunism was interwoven into his theory of organization. Whether history has proven her entirely correct on the organizational question in relation to the particular revolutionary movement in Russia is another matter. All we know is that some of Rosa's fears and also Leon Trotsky's were very legitimate. We will not, however, get into whether they were more correct than Lenin or vice versa. To do so would prove absolutely nothing since Lenin's theoretical position prevailed—the party was built—and it was the organization which seized "state power" in Russia.

Lenin had no sentimental illusions about the obstacles confronting the revolutionary movement in Russia. He knew perfectly well that no revolutionary organization had any possible hope of success unless secrecy was practiced and the membership of such an organization functioned with extreme caution. Only a well-disciplined body of revolution-

4 Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Political Writings.* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 295.

5 *Ibid.*

aries could effectively undertake propaganda and agitational work inside a country like Russia.

Neither a parliament nor freedom of assembly existed there. Many less disciplined organizations than the type Lenin proposed had been violently crushed by the repressive forces of the Tsarist government. A brief glimpse of Russian history should, therefore, verify Lenin's concern for organizational discipline.

Around 1867 a number of secret societies were formed in Russia. One of those societies was Zemlia i Volia (Land and Freedom). Students who were members of this organization went among the Russian peasants in hopes of organizing a massive peasant revolt. The Narodniks (those students who attempted to organize peasant revolts), were singled out by the police, and either killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile. Zemlia i Volia, however, was revived in 1879. Shortly afterwards, a split occurred inside that movement. The Narodnaia Volia (The People's Will) and Cherngi Peredel (The Black Partition) were the two organizations which emerged as a result of the split. The life spans of both of these new organizations were extremely short. But before Narodnaia Volia was crushed by the police, they assassinated the Tsar, Alexander II, in 1881.

In 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) was organized. Before this new party could establish itself, it was violently suppressed; and most of the leadership of, the RSDLP were either arrested or driven into exile. Since Lenin had been identified with the First Congress of the RSDLP, he was a marked-man; and he had to go into exile. Undoubtedly, these historical experiences and many others weighed heavily upon Lenin's mind when he formulated the theory of the vanguard party.

But the past was not dominating his thinking in 1902. The present stage of development of the revolutionary movement in Russia and its future was foremost in Lenin's mind. It was obvious to Lenin that the movement had not reached the magnitude necessary to overthrow the Tsarist government. It was also obvious to him that the movement was ideologically weak. Something had to be done to insure the success of the movement. Lenin, therefore, proposed the establishment of a vanguard party.

Lenin did not merely propose an organization of professionally trained revolutionaries as a panacea for the ills of the Russian movement. His diagnosis was far more comprehensive. Lenin made it clear that there were three levels of struggle: 1) economic; 2) theoretical; 3) political. He

also stated that the movement in Russia had to be genuine class struggle, transcending trade unionism and the bureaucratic red tape of trade union organizations. He further pointed out that political agitation could not be subordinated to agitation for an increase in workers wages and an improvement in working conditions. Economic agitation had to follow political agitation.

Lenin saw the struggle in Russia as more than a struggle against employers and government to firmly establish trade unionism. But the popular tendency among revolutionaries was this type of "economism." Unlike the "economist," Lenin recognized that in free countries the distinction between a political organization and a trade union was clear.

> In Russia, however, the yoke of autocracy appears at first glance to obliterate all distinction between the Social- Democrats organization and workers' association, since all workers associations and all study circles are prohibited; and since the principal manifestation and weapon of the workers' economic struggle—the strike—is regarded as a criminal (and sometimes even as a political) offense.[6]

Because it was not easy to see the differences between a political organization and a trade union, many revolutionaries made the mistake of confining their work to trade union activities.

"The scope of revolutionary work is too narrow, as compared with the breadth of the spontaneous basis of the movement," Lenin exclaimed. Undoubtedly, Lenin was aware of the importance of the spontaneous and creative activity of the masses. In fact he always subordinated his views on organization to politics. That is, he never dealt with organization theoretically without looking at spontaneity (creative political activity of the masses). Therefore, Lenin's views on organization were always in tune with the spontaneous development of the movement.

"Where in 1902, Lenin wanted the party to be a tight closely knit, small grouping with very exclusive standards for membership, he in 1905, wrote that workers should be incorporated into the ranks of the party or-

6 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works,* Vo. 5. 452.

ganization by the hundreds of thousands."[7] The general strike which took place in 1903, culminating in the October strike of 1905 which momentarily paralyzed the Russian economy, forced Lenin to adopt his new attitude.

In 1902 Lenin's conception of organization had obviously been forced on him. There was nothing fixed or permanent in his mind about organization. When Lenin advanced the theory of the Vanguard party, he was simply trying to provide the revolutionary movement with a clear understanding of how to combat certain specific, concrete and objective obstacles in the way of the revolution.

He never envisioned the vanguard party as an end in itself. It was to be the vehicle which would make it possible for the revolution to triumph. When Lenin proposed the creation of a body of professionally trained revolutionaries the movement in Russia was very weak. Just in terms of the number of people involved, that movement was relatively small in size in comparison with present day movements.

It is important to keep in mind that Russia was essentially a backward peasant society when the revolution occurred. According to the revolutionary theories of the time, Russia was the last place one would expect a successful revolution to occur. Most revolutionaries believed that the more advanced industrial nations would be the first to experience a violent upsurge of the mass of the population. But that did not mean that revolutionaries in the less developed capitalist countries had to sit around and wait on the revolution to occur first in places like Germany. No, they were expected to struggle relentlessly to build a revolutionary movement in less developed countries in anticipation of revolution in the highly industrialized countries.

That is what Lenin did. He submerged himself in the theoretical and practical tasks which were being created by the rapid development of the Russian movement. Unlike many of his comrades, Lenin was a very disciplined personality. He didn't play around with the notion of revolution. For revolutionary politics is very serious business. It's not something that can be approached in a haphazard manner.

Questions facing a revolutionary movement must be pursued consciously, methodically, and systematically. That is why Lenin emphasized

7 Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom,* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958) 182.

the need for revolutionary theory in *What Is To Be Done.* "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement," Lenin said. This is something we can't overemphasize. Lenin continued, "when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity." [8]

Lenin never wavered from his position on the importance of revolutionary theory. His writings which have been organized into a forty-five volume set (*Collected Works of Lenin*) represent his continuous effort to keep before the movement in Russia a sense of direction.

Many people have been inspired by Lenin's writings. For Lenin was fundamentally a Marxist. He never confided in any class except the working class. That was the only class that was consistently revolutionary. It was the only class that could unite the nation and take the socialist revolution to its completion. It was, therefore, the class which ultimately had to constitute the armed vanguard of the Russian revolution.

Both before and after Lenin's party came to power in Russia, Lenin stated unequivocally that "soviet" power had to be instituted in Russia. What Lenin meant was this: control had to be in the hands of the workers and peasants. "Power to the Soviets" meant allowing "the majority of the people" initiative and independence, not only in the election of deputies, but also in state administration in, effecting reforms and various other changes.[9]

For Lenin, the transfer of power to the workers and peasants was a simple matter. In the *Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It* he spelled out the procedure for establishing the "only control which is real." First, a revolutionary government has to issue certain decrees. The next step is to call upon the mass of the population to carry out the decrees and to smash the resistance of the exploiters. Nothing else was needed. "No special machinery, no special preparatory steps on the part of the state would be required," Lenin declared.[10]

In 1917 Lenin repeatedly and explicitly pointed out that the revolutionary movement in Russia had to be organized in a new way. By that time the key question at hand was the question of state power. The spe-

8 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works,* Vol. 5, 369.
9 *One of the Fundamental Questions of Revolution,* Vol. 25, 368 & 373.
10 *Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It,* Vol. 25, 331.

cific question was which class was to hold power. For the class which held power decided everything.

Lenin insisted that the "soviets" had to hold power. In other words, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" had to be established. But before that could be done, the Provisional Government, (which had been set up after the overthrow of the Tsarist regime) had to be crushed.

Around October 1917 the Provisional Government (Kerensky's government) collapsed and Lenin's party (the Bolsheviks) came to power. But the seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks did not resolve the fundamental question of state power. Historical hindsight tells us that the seizure of state power by Lenin's party was only a necessary step in the chain of events making up the Russian Revolution.

Even though the seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks represented a victory for both the proletariat and peasantry, historical hindsight again tells us that the task of instituting "soviet" power still remained. That task was the challenge which confronted Lenin and his party.

To say the least, the Bolsheviks failed to transfer power to the workers and peasants. Instead they created a huge bureaucracy which became the obstacle which continues to stand in the way of the revolution in Russia.

Today, it is impossible to side-step the fact that once the Bolshevik Party came to power it was no longer the vanguard—the vanguard party and the machinery of government became one. The Bolsheviks had, in fact, inherited the old state apparatus.

Lenin consequently found himself in constant struggle to resolve one of the fundamental contradictions of the Russian Revolution. He knew exactly what had to be done, but sudden illness and death cut short his efforts to chart out a new revolutionary path for Russia.

Before Lenin died he said, "Two main tasks confront us which constitute the epoch to reorganize our machinery of state, which is utterly useless, and which we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch... Our second task is the educational work among the peasants." [11] The Party, however, did not undertake the tasks Lenin defined as essential.

Following Lenin's death, the power struggle between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky took on a new character. It had become a struggle which

11 "On Co-operation," Vol. 33. 474.

would determine who would succeed Lenin. It would also determine the future course of the Russian Revolution.

Stalin won out over Trotsky. Subsequently, the abortion of the Russian Revolution proceeded with rapidity and the wholesale corruption of Lenin's ideas went into full swing. Undoubtedly, Lenin knew that it would happen. For in his Last Will and Testament he stated explicitly that Stalin must not succeed him. Trotsky was Lenin's choice. However, Lenin felt that Trotsky had one major flaw: he was overly confident and spent too much time with administrative details.

Since Lenin's death, there has been a raging debate over the theory of the vanguard party. All the polemical discussions have revolved around the universal applicability of what Lenin put forward in 1905. On one side of the fence, we have the vanguardists, who maintain that revolution is impossible unless there is a vanguard party leading it. On the other side of the fence are the politicos who argue that there is no longer any need for an organization of professional revolutionaries forming some sort of permanent leadership.

Our task here is to decide where Lenin stands on the question of the vanguard party. We already have some idea. That is, we know Lenin's concept of the type of organizational need was constantly expanding in proportion to the development of not only the Russian Revolution but also in proportion with the World Revolution.

Lenin made it clear in one of his last statements what would determine the final outcome of the revolution. "In the last analysis," he said,

> the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect, there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.[12]

12 "Better Fewer, But Better," Vol. 33, 501

It is important to keep in mind that Lenin never said a vanguard organization or party would be the determining factor of the revolution. Lenin knew that even in a place like Russia it was not the Party, but the initiative and independence of the workers and peasants, which would make the socialist revolution possible.

In other words, Lenin saw the self-organization of the masses as the essential condition for the continuous success of the Russian Revolution. Self-organization translated into theoretical language is called spontaneity. So we must conclude that Lenin was not opposed to spontaneity, as some people are contending, or as it may appear from a misreading of *What Is To Be Done.*

What Lenin was opposed to in 1902 was the opportunistic and anarchistic tendencies among revolutionaries. He was opposed to the bureaucratic red tape which dominated the trade union movement. He was also opposed to the corruption of the whole notion of spontaneity (free and creative activity of the masses). These were just a few of the things which were stifling the development of the revolutionary movement in Russia before 1917.

Lenin felt that it was the responsibility of revolutionaries, like himself, to place their knowledge and special skills at the disposal of the mass movement. He felt that they could do that best through organization. Organization was not the end, it was only a means to achieve a higher purpose. Once the Bolshevik Party had seized "state power," the original purpose for the creation of that organization had been achieved. Something new, a new type of organization had to be created to carry the movement to its completion.

Lenin said that the new organism had to be "Soviet Power." Organization per se was no longer foremost in Lenin's mind, except that organization which emanates directly from the free and creative political activity of the masses. Lenin had absolute confidence in the workers' and peasants' ability to mobilize and organize themselves. He therefore told his Party on various occasions that they had to look to the workers and peasants for the leadership in the reorganization of the Russian economy. But the Party was imbued with the idea that leadership in the reorganization of the Rus-

sian an economy. The Party was imbued with the idea that leadership had to come from above rather than from below.

SPONTANEITY AND ORGANIZATION

"But history, like agriculture, draws its nourishment from the valleys and not from the heights, from the average social level and not from men of eminence." —Jose 'Ortega y Gasset[13]

Since the Russian Revolution in 1917, all uncertainties about what is required to bring about a complete revolutionary transformation of society have been removed.

Today we know that the essential condition for a revolutionary reconstitution of society is the self-movement and creative political activity of the mass of the world population. When we translate this recognition into theoretical language the essential condition for revolutionary change becomes spontaneity.

Spontaneity is an abstract and universal concept like organization. It does not mean that things just happen out of the clear blue sky. Neither is it a call for anarchy. In simple language spontaneity means "free and creative political activity." It is merely a recognition of the importance of the self-movement of ordinary working people in relation to the activity of established organizations.

In the past, most people considered organization as the essential means for bringing about change, but to emphasize the importance of organization today is to emphasize essentially nothing. We have to be much more specific about the type of organization—churches, schools, social clubs, cooperatives, associations, trade unions, political parties, etc. are all forms of organization. None of these highly developed and established forms of organization represent the type of organization that is necessary to bring about fundamental changes in both economic and property relations in today's society.

Our most cherished forms or organizations have repeatedly failed to take a decisive political position in relation to the political struggle of oppressed people. They have not demonstrated either the will or capacity to transform modern capitalist society (including those organizations with

13 Jose Ortega y Gassett, *Revolt of the Masses.* Reissue Edition. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994) 26. [ed.]

the most revolutionary posture, policies and programs). By now it should be clear that the dominant forms of organization are nothing more than "official" institutions of capitalist society. And that their very existence and influence depends entirely upon the continual development and domination of international capitalism.

In many respects it is clear that organization, as we have known it, is not the revolutionary answer. However, most intellectuals and other middle class scoundrels who cloak themselves in revolutionary rhetoric still attach a fundamental importance to organization, rather than to spontaneity. They look down on the spontaneous upsurge and creative political activity of the masses in the most distasteful way.

People from the ranks of the middle class are quick to describe the masses as backward, unorganized and undisciplined. They usually see the self-movement of ordinary people as disorganization. But the only disorganization present when there is a tremendous upsurge of the masses is the disorganization of the minds of those who are intellectually bankrupt.

During crisis situations, professionals have nothing to say except that we must approach our problems systematically. The type of organization most professionals see as necessary is a small group of highly educated people meeting behind closed doors in a mahogany-furnished room, deciding the fate of the movement on paper. But what the professionals attempt to organize on paper, poor people are busy organizing daily on their jobs, in their homes and communities.

The best planners and organizers in our society are people who have to hustle and scuffle everyday just to subsist. The "less educated," in terms of formal schooling and training, tend to be less idealistic in their approach to problems. On the surface, quite often it appears that the toiling masses are floating in an ocean of disorganization without a sense of direction and purpose. However, the ordinary man and woman is not as lost as he or she appears to be, and whenever the opportunity presents itself they demonstrate a phenomenal capacity to organize in society what revolutionaries, socialists, Marxist-Leninists, etc. try to organize in their heads.

Modern capitalist society itself has prepared the ordinary man and woman and created the conditions for the life-and-death struggles taking place in every corner of the world. In Asia, Latin America, Africa, etc., both workers and peasants have come to the forefront of every revolution-

ary movement demonstrating not only their readiness, but also their preparedness to take charge of society and create new institutions. But many obstacles have stood in their way.

The obstacle which causes the defeat, decline, and collapse of all revolutionary movements is the corruption of political leaders and political parties in whom the masses place their confidence. From the French Revolution and the creation of the Paris Commune in 1871, to the creation of Ghana, the only people who have shown a willingness to take the revolution to its completion has been the toiling masses. In each situation, however, organization has won out over spontaneity. That is, those individuals and organizations which have been ushered into power have put a brake on the revolution in an attempt to consolidate their own new power.

In every country today the masses are still violently opposed to the forces of oppression and exploitation. At certain critical moments in history the masses have seized the opportunity to register their opposition. And it has been the total refusal of the mass of populations to be governed by an oppressive system which has made revolution possible.

On the contrary, political leaders, or small bands of men do not make revolutions. If it were possible for them to do so, revolutions would occur daily. It is not possible because modern capitalist society has reached a stage of both organization and disorganization that can only be successfully challenged by massive political upheaval.

We have to recognize that the world has changed tremendously since the Russian Revolution. What was possible and applicable then is neither possible nor applicable now. Time, place and circumstances must always be taken into consideration when we try to determine what is necessary to bring about fundamental changes in the world body politic. Few political leaders, however, take the time to do a thorough analysis of the world in which we live. If they did, they would see that the only people capable of getting us out of the mess we are in are the toiling masses.

The most serious mistake every political leader has made is not confiding in the masses. Instead they have placed their confidence in organization. But the type of organization that is essential for a transformation of any society can only be created through spontaneity. That is, the people at the point of production and the exchange process are the only ones who can straighten out the mess created by the capitalist mode of production. They are the only ones that can organize a new society.

"Spontaneity organizes." That is something few political leaders and students of politics recognize. They don't see that because organization is foremost in their heads; or better, the type of organization they are accustomed to is their only conception of organization. To them organization is something fixed, permanent, and holy. It is structured with an identifiable leadership separate from the rank-and-file. And the most concrete form organization takes in political leaders' minds is a political party.

"Organization does not necessarily mean, however, a Vanguard or mass political party."[14] The specific and concrete form organization takes varies in accordance with the objective situation and historical experiences confronting those oppressed and exploited people who discard their petty differences and engage in collective thought and action. The life span of every new form of organization which has emerged out of the spontaneous awakening and creative political activity of the masses is likewise determined by the circumstances and objective conditions under which an organized body of people have to function.

But more important than the form and longevity of organization is the content of its activity and what is achieved through it. It is imperative that we always keep our eyes focused on what a thing does. That is how we determine what it is and what purpose it serves. For instance, Frantz Fanon observed carefully the activity of African nationalist parties in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth.* Fanon was able to determine that regardless of how revolutionary those parties were, the content of their activity showed that they were nothing more than replicas of European political parties. "The notion of the party is a notion imported from the mother country," Fanon wrote. He stated further, "We have seen that inside the nationalist parties the will to break colonialism is linked with another quite different will: that of coming to a friendly agreement with it."[15]

Robert Michels, in his book *Political Parties,* recognized that political parties in general tend to waver once they attain a certain degree of clout. Michels also noticed that as the strength of a political party grows "it loses

14 A point George Rawick emphasized in a letter to Damali in response to the first draft of this document. [K.M.]

See George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972); George Rawick. *Listening to Revolt: Selected Writings.* David Roediger and Martin Smith, eds. (Chicago: Charles H Kerr, 2010) [ed.]

15 Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth.* (New York: Grove, 1965) 124. [ed.]

its revolutionary impetus, becomes sluggish, not in respect to action alone, but also in the sphere of thought." One of the factors Michels attributed to the degeneration of these organizations was the fact that political parties do not want to irritate the state upon which their very existence depends. So, instead of encouraging political activity, political parties (including those which claim to be revolutionary) suppress politics.[16]

The suppression of politics is a very highly organized activity. People who reject spontaneity consciously or unconsciously participate in this suppression, which is carried out in its most violent form by the policing apparatus of the state. Intellectuals, journalists, lecturers, political leaders, writers, professionals, etc., are the agents which are usually employed to discredit the creativeness in the self-movement of the masses. They spread the hysteria about riots, etc.

Today, however, people don't riot. "Men who read Lenin, Fanon and Che...they mass, they rage, they dig graves," wrote George Jackson in one of his letters from Soledad Prison, Salinas, California.[17] The message that George Jackson was trying to transmit from prison was this: Although prison rebellions may seem unorganized, the activity of the men on the inside represents consciousness, creativity, discipline, organization and purpose. But when we read the newspaper, magazines and books frequently we are led to believe that prisoners are nothing more than animals acting without a sense of purpose and direction.

People who rebel, resist and enter into life and death struggles never act without a sense of direction. They know what they want and they organize themselves to get what they want. Contained within that spontaneity is a phenomenal capacity for organization. In fact, spontaneity is not something divorced from organization. Both develop out of each other. At the abstract or theoretical level, some people define the relationship between organization and spontaneity as a contradiction. However, contradiction can only be seen when there is movement. We must also keep in mind Hegel's statement in *Science of Logic*: "all things are contradictory in themselves. Contradiction is the root of all movement and life, and it is

16 Robert Michels, *Political Parties.* (New York: Hearst International Library, 1915) 371. [ed.]

17 George Jackson. *Soledad Brother.* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994) 27. [ed.]

only in so far as it contains a contradiction that anything moves and has impulse and activity."[18]

The relationship between spontaneity and organization is very tricky and complex. One could spend a lifetime trying to identify the intrigues of the interconnection. But with the accumulation of new universal-historical facts one thing is certain: the essential condition for a revolutionary reconstitution of society is the self-movement and creative political activity of the masses. In other words, spontaneity must be king.

BLACK LEADERSHIP FALL PREY TO VANGUARDISM

"A vanguard is a vanguard only in special circumstances and in relation to certain very special purposes. It has no advantage in itself. There is not, and cannot be, any permanent selection of a group of individuals able to direct the working class."— C.L.R. James [19]

It is somewhat ironic that so many young Black politicals still adhere to the theory of the vanguard party. The irony of the situation lies in the realization that historically the Black masses have exploded with a disciplined spontaneity.

The "Black Revolution" in America has never waited on or subordinated itself to any revolutionary party. Somehow Black people have always recognized certain political opportunities, mobilized and organized themselves to take advantage of those opportunities. The self-movement and creativity of the Black masses has had a much more profound and revolutionary impact upon developments in the United States than the activity of any organization masquerading as "the vanguard" of the American movement.

The only other movement which has shaken the American body politically like the Black movement has been the labor movement. Even though the labor movements during the 1930s and 1940s were heavily influenced by the propaganda of "leftist" parties, the strength of that movement is likewise to be found in the capacity of the working class for self-organization. That is much more evident today than it ever was because we have had an opportunity to see the limitations and contradictions of

18 G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic.* (New York: Cambridge Univerity Press, 2010) 381-382. [ed.]

19 C.L.R. James et al., *Facing Reality.* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1974) 93. [ed.]

unions (a disguised form of the vanguard party) and "official" labor leadership.

Union leadership has repeatedly sold-out the interest of the American working class, thus making the "wildcat strike" a historical imperative. That is, workers have had to move in spite of—and quite often in direct opposition to—union leadership. Black workers in particular have had to take the initiative and act independent of organized labor to gain recognition and better positions in the production process. By doing so, Black workers have not only increased their possibilities of progress in industry but they have also broken down many barriers which confronted the average workers irrespective of sex and color.

In 1938 Mzee C.L.R. James recognized the capacity of both the working class and the Black movement for independent action. James stated that neither the working class nor the Black movement had to wait on any vanguard organization. In respect to the development of the Black movement he specifically upheld its independence and stated that it has "a vitality and a validity of its own...that it is able to exercise a powerful influence upon the revolutionary working class: that it has got a great contribution to make to the development of the working class in the United States, and that it is in itself a constituent part of the struggle for socialism."[20]

Today, many political elements pay lip-service to the theoretical formulation of Mzee (the wise old man); But neither the "white left" nor Black political leadership has taken a decisive political stand in relation to the contention that the Black movement must not be subordinated to any vanguard party. For all practical purposes, it is safe to say that the most militant and revolutionary leadership in the United States has almost completely retreated from the revolutionary ground plowed by Mzee C.L.R. James.

As soon as the Black movement reached its peak in 1966—with Stokely Carmichael's articulation of "Black Power" and with the formation of the Black Panther Party—the theory of the vanguard party took root inside the Black community.[21] Conservatives, moderates, and militant elements, in chorus, began to sing about the need for a vanguard organiza-

20 See Scott McLemee (ed.), *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question"*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 138–147. [ed.]

21 See Stokely Carmichael and Charles V Hamilton, *Black Power*. (New York: Random House, 1967). [ed.]

tion. And white "leftists" groups, organizations and personalities jumped on the bandwagon, in harmony, lending support to the specific idea of creating an independent Black political party.

Black political leaders fell prey to the vanguard party theory in a very frightful way. By 1968 Huey P. Newton was stating that: "The sleeping masses must be bombarded with the correct approach to struggle through the activities of the vanguard party."[22] But the sleeping masses, as Huey defined them, were wide awake. They had never been asleep and they did not need to be bombarded with the correct approach to struggle through the activity of any vanguard organization.

Unfortunately, Huey failed to fully appreciate the significance of his own organization's entry into the American body politic in relation to the new upsurge of the Black masses. Huey was not, however, the only one who failed to recognize and appreciate the capacity of the Black masses for self-organization. Black leadership as a whole failed to do so. That was evident when Black leaders at the National Black Political Convention held in Gary Indiana on March 10-12, 1972, declared: "We are the Vanguard. The challenge is to transform ourselves from favor seeking vassals and loud-talking militant pawns, and to take up the role that the unorganized masses of our people have attempted to play."[23]

Although this declaration has a very nice ring, it only reflects the degenerate mentality that has overwhelmed Black middle class leadership. How can bunch of self-proclaimed "favor-seeking vassals and loud-talking militant pawns" talk about transforming themselves into something else, and in the same breath proclaim themselves "the vanguard?" They aren't any vanguard. In fact, Black middle class leadership is so disorganized that at the moment it would even be pretentious for them to define themselves as the rear-guard of the Black movement.

It is somewhat disgusting to hear self-styled Black leaders talk about leading the "unorganized" masses. It was the "unorganized" masses who congregated on the streets, defied curfews, engaged in direct physical confrontation with the police and military apparatus of the United States gov-

22 Huey Newton, "The Correct Handling of a Revolution." In *The Black Panthers Speak*. Philip S. Foner, ed. (New York: Da Capo, 2002) 41-45. [ed.]

23 National Black Political Convention. (1972) "The Gary Declaration: Black Politics at the Crossroads." In *Modern Black Nationalism*. William L. Van Deburg, ed. (New York: NYU Press, 1997) 142. [ed.]

ernment, and unleashed a burning assault upon the property of their oppressors. If the Black masses were unorganized, it definitely didn't appear that they were. George Novack said in an article in Newsweek magazine, "Black Uprising, 1967," that: "the Afro-American struggle exhibited the power and creativity of an oppressed giant. The actions were spontaneous, spasmodic, uncontrolled, undirected and localized."[24]

All the major rebellions erupted spontaneously and violently—Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Newark and Detroit in 1967. No single organization or political personality can claim credit or take responsibility for what happened. The people who were responsible and to whom recognition must be given was a nameless mass. No one had to tell them what to do; they mobilized and organized themselves and did what had to be done.

Organization was their "least" problem. More Black organizations mushroomed in the United States with the tremendous upsurge of the Black masses during the 1960s than during any other period in American history. But none of those organizations could gain hegemony (total control) over the movement. Their roles and longevity were determined by the social forces from which they sprung. Some of the organizations which emerged only lasted a day or so, and the only form some of them took was mass action. But that is less important than the impact they had and the content of their activity.

Seemingly, the "Black Revolution" blossomed overnight. The new militancy which was contained in the political banner, Black Power, and symbolized by the Black Panther Party, had been brewing since 1963. It was a direct consequence of the violent experiences of the Civil Rights Movement. What appeared to be little insignificant, isolated and incidental conflicts between a Black person and "official" symbols of authority (police, teachers, social workers, etc.) only served to bring this militancy to its boiling point. Of course, the media also helped to heat the pot. The media did that unintentionally by distorting, sensationalizing and vulgarizing this new militancy in an attempt to discredit it.

However, the new militancy of the Black community could not be discredited. Once it was set into motion it immediately found a place in

24 See *The Black Uprisings: Newark, 1967, Detroit.* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1967); George Breitman and George Novack, *Black Nationalism and Socialism.* (Detroit: Merit Publishers, 1968) [ed.]

the "souls of Black folks"—consequently, it was impossible to prevent it from spreading. As soon as activity broke out in a town, country or city, Black people living there would get on their telephones and inform their friends and relatives living in other places. If they did not call, they would write letters and describe what was happening. When letter writing and telephoning failed, independent Black newspapers carried the news from one area to another.

Black people effectively exploited the advanced communications system which has been developed inside the United States. Even the people in the most remote rural areas of the country were aware of what was happening because they have access to radios, television, newspapers, magazines and telephones, just like people in highly industrial urban communities. Since the majority of Black people are city dwellers anyway, keeping the majority of the Black population abreast of developments was not a major problem, except that so many things were occurring so fast.

Local, state, and national governmental agencies tried with little success to prevent the spread of this new Black militancy. The Model Cities Demonstration Agency Act (which was passed by the United States Congress in 1966) was the first major step taken to curb the rise of "Black Power" and the influence of the Black Panther Party. Millions and millions of dollars were earmarked for cities which had either experienced the wrath of the Black masses, or which had been identified as possible hot spots. Over twenty million dollars was poured into Detroit, Michigan alone. Immediately after the 1967 rebellions, large sums of monies were poured into most relatively large Black communities via such agencies as: Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW); Housing and Urban Development (HUD); Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), etc.[25] These monies went into programs which were specifically designed either to co-opt localized movements or to violently repress them if cooptation proved impossible.

Most Black organizations were suckered into accepting monies from governmental agencies. Those organizations which refused such monies and continued to aggressively challenge the appendages of American capi-

25 United States Government, Model Cities Administration. "Program Guide: Model Neighborhoods in Demonstration Cities." *Title I of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966.* (Washington: US Government Printers, 1966) [ed.]

talism were categorized as "Black extremists." The so-called extremists became victims of constant police harassment and brutality. The extremists were jailed, murdered, or forced into exile.[26]

The Black Panther Party suffered the most serious blows during this period. That organization was singled out by the United States government as the most serious threat to the internal security of the nation. Subsequently, a national campaign was initiated to destroy the Black Panther Party. That campaign reached its most violent height with the raid on the Black Panther Party's headquarters in Chicago, Illinois. Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated by the Chicago police department in that particular raid.[27]

The Black Panther Party was unable to withstand the swift and violent assaults emanating from a national plan to destroy them. No organization functioning as a vanguard had any possible chance of doing so. But, instead of moving away from the notion of building a Marxist-Leninist Party, the Black Panthers sunk deeper into it. New recruits were forced to memorize certain Marxist cliches. After memorizing these cliches, these up-starts in the Black Panther Party went around quoting Marx and Lenin without understanding Marxism-Leninism, particularly its application to the Black movement in the United States.

As a Marxist-Leninist Party based on Lenin's theory of the vanguard party, the Black Panthers had no choice but to attach a fundamental importance to organization. As a vanguard organization, it had to have a party "line" which all members were bound to follow. The representatives of the party had to be agents whose sole function was to carry out decisions made for them by the Central Committee. Anyone that was caught in serious violation of party rules and regulations had to be exposed in the party newspaper and purged. The maintenance of the party "line" and discipline had to prevail at all times.

The leadership of the Black Panther Party failed to realize that it was impossible to concentrate the revolutionary energies of the Black masses into a party bureaucracy. They did not understand the dialectic relationship between organization and spontaneity. That is, the Central Com-

26 See Dean Kotlowitz. *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001) [ed.]

27 See Jeffrey Haas. *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther.* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010) [ed.]

mittee of the Black Panther Party did not realize that their strength as an organization came as a result of the self-organization and creativity of the Black masses. The major reason why that organization had become a national threat is because Black youths across the United States initiated action in the name of the Black Panther Party. Also, the reason why the Panthers weren't totally destroyed is because Black people spontaneously rose to their defense.

Black political leadership in general should have learned a great deal from the experiences of the Black Panther Party. The leadership of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, in particular, should have learned from mistakes the Panthers were making. Like the Panthers, the leadership of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers also tried to build a Marxist-Leninist Party. They failed miserably too, except their failure was not a result of violent police repression.

Even though the national impact of the Black Panther Party was much greater than the League's impact, the potential of the League was much greater than the Panther's potential. The membership of the League was largely people at the point of production. That in itself gave the League an advantage that most other organizations didn't have: It didn't have to rely heavily upon adventurous and militaristic intimidation. Instead, it could use the threat of a general strike as its most powerful weapon by Black workers.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers grew out of the self-organization of Black workers in the automobile plants in Detroit in 1967. The first organization to develop out of this spontaneity was the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) in 1968 in the Hamtramck Assembly Plant of the Chrysler Corporation. DRUM served as a catalyst for the Eldon Axle Revolutionary Movement (ELRUM), Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM), Chevrolet Revolutionary Union Movement (CRUM), etc. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers wasn't actually organized until in 1969. It was formed to serve as the umbrella organization (i.e. it was a federation of various movements).

The formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers cemented Detroit's reputation: "The heart of the Black Revolution." No other organization of its caliber existed anywhere in the United States. The closest federation of Black workers resembling the League was ITAC, which is essentially a trade union movement based in Jamaica (West Indies). Un-

like ITAC, the League did not view itself as a federation of trade unions.[28] In July 1970, the League published "The Overall Program of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers." That document stated that the League was first and foremost a political organization. "Most importantly, the direction of our organization is clear," the document read. "We are not talking about dealing with a single issue as the only factor, nor are we talking about reforms in the system; but we are talking about the seizure of state power."

Just as Lenin saw the vanguard party as a necessity for seizing state power in 1905, the leadership of the League saw the vanguard party as a necessity for seizing state power in the United States. The aforementioned document outlining the League program contained the following statement:

> It is clear to us that the development of our struggle based on concrete realities dictates the need for a Black people's liberation political party. We state unequivocally that this must be a Black Marxist-Leninist party designed to liberate Black people; dedicated to leading the workers struggle in this country and resolved to wage a relentless struggle against imperialism.

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28 See Independent Trade Union Advisory Council, *Forward to Freedom.* (Kingston, Jamaica: ITAC, 1970); Joseph Edwards, *Unions versus Menegement.* (Kingston, Jamaica: New Beginning, 1971); Joseph Edwards, *Workers' Self-Management in the Caribbean.* (Atlanta: On Our Own Authority! Publishing, 2013).

Mohammed is correct that ITAC was more conservative than the LRBW. But its most outstanding spokesman, Joseph Edwards, the refrigeration mechanic who led the wildcat strike at a Meatpacking Plant in Westmoreland, Jamaica in 1968, was arguably more radical in his political thought than both the League and Mohammed himself. Edwards had a clear vision of workers self-management in the industrial workplace and had facilitated it. Inspired by C.L.R. James, Edwards believed James inconsistently broke with elite party politics and saw popular committees of workers at times as an appendage to the state.

The title of Edwards's pamphlet is not a typographical error, though it has been mistakenly percieved this way by some. Harnessing Rasta idiom, he was against "one-menism"—the idea that politics needed to be organized around singular politicians and personalities about society. He would later critically refer to Mikhell Menlie—the prime minister of Jamaica generally viewed as socialist, progressive, and affirmative of workers participation. "Men" as opposed to "Man" was a satanic reference for the Rastafarian faith. [ed.]

It was a mistake for the leadership of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers to concentrate its energies upon building a Marxist-Leninist party. Like most organizations today which view themselves as a vanguard party, the League developed an unmanageable bureaucracy. All decisions and directives flowed from the hierarchy down through the various sub-leadership groups to the rank-and-file. This led to the rise of commandism and dogmatism within the organizational structure. Thus, the leadership became overly concerned with the administration of the organization.

By the end of 1971, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers had totally disintegrated. Even though the League's executive body was composed of seasoned young Black politicals, very little theoretical work had been undertaken by this leadership group. That leadership group had made very few attempts to expand the League's contact with workers outside the Detroit area. Essentially, it had limited itself to superimposing an obsolete organizational form upon an organization which by its very existence negated the whole notion of the necessity for a vanguard organization.

Despite the disintegration of the League, Black workers are still organizing themselves in opposition to inhuman working conditions, inadequate wages, excessive working hours, discriminatory employment practices, etc. They are waging a relentless struggle not only against their employers and miserable working conditions, but also against the unions that, in theory, represent them. More important, Black workers are beginning to consciously and systematically support the struggle against colonialism and imperialism. In the states of Maryland and Louisiana, Black dock workers (longshoremen) refused to unload chrome from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Black workers at Polaroid Camera Company have taken the lead in exposing that company and the United States involvement in the exploitation and oppression of Black people in South Africa.[29]

29 For a brief discussion of Black workers sanctions against imperialism in Africa see th following: William Minter et al, *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists Over Half A Century, 1950-2000.* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008) 115-117; Ken Lawrence, "Historic Protest in the Deep South: Dockworkers Slow Ore Ship." *The Southern Patriot.* (April, 1972) 1, 2. [ed.]

The activity of Black workers in the United States is not dependent upon any vanguard party—an organized body of professional revolutionaries. With or without a formal organizational structure, Black people in general will voice their opposition to oppression and exploitation. Usually new forms of organization emerge out of the spontaneous and creative political activity of workers. But there is nothing necessarily final or permanent about any organization which grows out of spontaneity. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, for example, was a logical result of the self-organization and creative activity of Black workers primarily in the automobile plants in Detroit. When that organization became a fetter, it disappeared. However, the hostility and the revolt of the Black workers didn't disappear with it.

All one had to do is go into a bar where employed, underemployed and unemployed workers hang-out and listen very carefully. People will be discussing how fed-up they are with the excessive hours they have to work and also the hazards confronting them on their jobs. Quite often, people will be talking about the things they do to make sure they don't kill themselves by overworking. Very few people will say anything about retiring from a job. However, when they do, their major concern is will they be able to last long enough to retire; and, if so, will they live long enough afterwards to enjoy the meager pension benefits their employer will send them.

The economics of the epoch breeds discontent among the working class as a whole. Black people tend to be the most hostile and rebellious element of the working class, primarily because of their historical relation to the productive process, as both an exploited class and race. Actually, Black people have been conditioned for political struggle by modern capitalist society itself. Their capacity for self-organization has been enhanced tremendously by the rapid development of the United States.

The mistake most Black political leaders make is to view the Black masses as backward, unorganized, and undisciplined. That is the attitude which has driven them into the pit of the vanguard party theory. It is also the attitude which literally destroyed the momentum of the "Black Power" movement. Once Black leaders fell prey to vanguardism they subsequently became a brake of the "Black Revolution." Instead of trying to discover new ways to unleash the revolutionary energies of the Black masses, they began to figure out ways to harness and control these energies.

The creation of an independent Black political party became the overriding concern of Black leadership. "The Role of the Vanguard Party," an essay by James and Grace Boggs, reflects the tremendous importance Black leaders attached to this idea. "For the Black movement and the Black community the necessity for the rapid development of a party able to give revolutionary leadership to the masses is not an abstract question," James and Grace wrote. They stated that it was "a matter of the utmost urgency." And those personalities who considered themselves revolutionary nationalist agreed strongly with James and Grace's position.

A Manifesto For A Black Revolutionary Party, by James Boggs, is probably one of the most widely circulated pamphlets advancing the vanguard organization theory. Boggs contends that: "without such a party, the masses are without revolutionary leadership, and without revolutionary leadership there is no successful revolution."[30] Whereas there is some truth to the latter part of Boggs' statement, it is totally incorrect to say implicitly that revolutionary leadership only emerges from the creation of a political party. Historically, revolutionary leadership has emerged from the lowest depths of mass movement itself.

Two of the most widely read revolutionary theoreticians and practitioners—Malcom X and George Jackson—emerged out of the struggle below. Both of them were primarily self-educated men who spent a great deal of time in prison. In fact, George Jackson never left prison after he was sent there. Like Malcolm, he was murdered, except Malcolm was killed on the outside and George on the inside.

Before the life was snuffed out of the fiery EI-Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X), he had been like a "voice crying in the wilderness" preparing both Black leadership and the Black masses for the events we witnessed during Black Power's heyday. In his "Message to the Grassroots," Malcolm brought back the dynamism of Black nationalism which had disappeared with the decline of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and its charismatic leader, Marcus Garvey. Malcolm told his audience, "A revolutionary is a Black nationalist...If you're afraid of Black nationalism you're afraid of revolution. And, if you love revolution, you love Black nationalism."

30 James and Grace Lee Boggs, "The Role of the Vanguard Party." *Monthly Review.* 21.11 (April 1970) 9-24. This was a special issue entitled *Lenin Today.* [ed.]

While Malcolm X was affiliated with the Nation of Islam, he stressed the need for a separate Black nation. But after Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam and traveled extensively in Africa, Malcolm began to talk about nationalism in terms of the importance of Black solidarity. In 1964 he formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity for the specific purpose of advancing the cause of the Afro-American struggle. And, Malcolm began to emphasize the need for Black people to resist and struggle against the repressive and exploitative forces of American capitalism more so than he had previously.[31]

Unlike Malcolm X, most Black leaders who defined themselves as Black nationalists continued to push the idea of forming a separate nation. Limiting or defining Black nationalism merely as a demand for a separate Black nation only forced Black leadership to further concern itself with the creation of some sort of political party. Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) came forward with a pamphlet entitled, *Strategy and Tactics of a Pan-African Nationalist Party.* In that document Imamu said, "if we are talking about nation, we must talk about party, because a party is finally the only structure able to govern coherently."[32] Not only is Imamu's statement ideologically incorrect, but it presupposes that the vast majority of Black people in the United States want to form a separate Black nation. And that, definitely, is not reflective of the present attitude of the mass of the Black population.

Black people may eventually be forced to embark upon a totally autonomous course of nationhood. At the moment, however, they are struggling to control the communities in which they live, especially those communities in which they are a majority. Each battle that has been fought around issues of "community control" has heightened the consciousness

31 See Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks.* George Breitman, ed. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990); Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary.* (New York: Pathfinder, 1992); Malcolm X, *February 1965: The Final Speeches.* (New York: Panthfinder, 1992).

For a concise introduction see Matthew Quest, "Malcolm X (1925-1965)," in *American Counter-Cultures.* Vol. 2 Gina Misiroglu, ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009) 459-461. For the most current study and controversy see Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention.* (New York: Viking, 2011); Jared Ball and Todd Burroughs eds., *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable's Malcolm X.* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 2012). [ed.]

32 See Amiri Baraka, *Strategy and Tactics of a Pan African Nationalist Party.* (Newark: CFUN, 1971). [ed.]

of Black people tremendously and sharpened the contradictions. But the level of consciousness and sharpness of contradictions varies in relation to the objective socioeconomic conditions and political struggles Black people are experiencing in their various communities. That is why the appeal for Black nationalism has varied from one community to the next. That is also why the form Black nationalism takes will vary from one community to another.

In 1948, Oliver Cox stated in *Caste, Class and Race* that Afro-Americans would never become nationalistic: "The numerical balance of the races will not allow the development of nationalistic antagonism on the part of colored people," Cox said.[33] But Cox was incorrect. Throughout the 1960s Black nationalism grew at a phenomenal rate. Racial antagonisms took on a new militant twist, quite similar to the militancy which emerged in 1919 and caused the poet Claude McKay to write: "If we must die, we will die fighting back."

Black nationalism in America has seldom been expressed in the form of a demand for a separate nation. Instinctively, Black people stray away from the nation-state idea, recognizing its obsoleteness in light of the domination of international capitalism. Usually, Black nationalism is an expression of resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression. That is only natural because the roots of Black nationalism are to be found in the very conditions under which Black people have participated in the development of American capitalism.

Black middle class leadership, however, has failed to undertake a thorough analysis of the rise of Black nationalism in the United States. They see the rise of Black nationalism as a psychological phenomena, rather than a logical, historical development. This blindness has led many well-meaning Black politicals to the party concept, which has only served to increase their blindness. That is, it has caused them to attach more importance to organization than to spontaneity—to place the interest of organization before the interest of the people.

Throughout the 1960s, Black leaders continually defined lack of organization as Black people's most serious problem. Today, the cry is still for an independent political party. But what the Black movement needs more is a clear and decisive ideological position and a solid theoretical

33 See Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race.* (New York: Monthly Review, 1970). [ed.]

basis. If Black leadership has any function, then one of its most important functions is to undertake the new theoretical and practical tasks which the Black masses create from it. That is the only way leadership can continuously provide clarity and keep before the mass movement a sense of purpose and direction.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

It has been the irresponsibility and outright betrayal of Black political leadership, which has ushered the Black movement into a total state of disarray in the United States. And it is going to take a tremendous amount of time and energy to get the Black movement back on its feet again.

Cleaning up the mess which bankrupt Black political leaders have created seems almost like an impossible task. But it is a task that must be undertaken with confidence. As we proceed, we must not hesitate to expose the corrupt elements among our ranks.

Our first order of business is to wipe out professionalism. Politics is not an activity to be undertaken solely by a small privileged and professional band of men and women. It must encompass the entire world body politic, for politics is in actuality a highly concentrated form of economics.

While we are systematically ridding ourselves of professionalism, we must simultaneously reorganize our thinking. The reorganization of our political thinking is necessary because it has become too narrow, limited and elitist. Unless we immediately begin to expand our vision, we will constantly find ourselves submerged in cynicism, pessimism, and despair.

A feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness has already begun to surface inside the Black movement. But that particular feeling can easily be overcome. All we have to do is start at our last high peak—Black Power—and show through analyses the heights we reached. Not only must our analyses show our accomplishments, they must also show our failures and mistakes. If such analyses are properly done, we will have the type of transmission fuel needed to transcend feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness.

Continuous theoretical work will be necessary to keep our motors running well. Theoretical work, however, cannot be carried on in a vacuum. Every effort must be made to take theory out of the world of academics and to integrate it into the day-to-day struggles of the mass of the population where it rightfully belongs. That is, theoretical jargon must be

broken down into understandable language and placed before the masses, and the ordinary man and woman must be encouraged to undertake theoretical work not only in cooperation with intellectuals, but also without the influence of any "official" symbols of leadership.

Many people think it is ridiculous to encourage the ordinary man and woman to involve themselves with theoretical problems facing the movement. It is not as ridiculous as it sounds. It may, however, be somewhat idealistic. That is, the ordinary man and woman has so little free time, if any, to pursue in depth studies and to formulate their ideas in writing. Nevertheless, it is they who will bring about a resolution of our theoretical problems.

Normally, intellectuals only pose certain theoretical questions. They do not resolve them except on paper. But even to do that they must be in close contact with the movement below. Furthermore, those intellectuals who have totally integrated themselves into the mass movement have discovered that the ordinary man and woman is also quite capable of posing theoretical questions. The average person, however, does not pose things in the same manner and tone as those who have been thoroughly educated in educational institutions of "official" society.[34] Their language is usually void of most of the sentimental idealism contained in the oral and written presentations of those who have been formally trained in "official" schools of thought.

The language of the average Black person is also usually void of mystical notions of "Blackness." However, a great deal of mysticism has filtered down from Black middle class "cultural nationalists" to the movement below. Therefore, an effort has to be made to put "Blackness" back into its proper historical context.

"Blackness" is a political banner which the Black masses will always rally around when it's necessary to do so. Outside of the framework of revolutionary struggle, "Blackness" has no meaning. It's like "a pitcher before an empty fountain." Or, it's like an empty well—in which one sees no hope of quenching ones thirst.

Under the disguise of "Blackness," a number of Black "militants" have tried to superimpose outdated feudal relations upon the Black movement

34 The author is using the critique of "official society" found in the chapter "The Self-Confessed Bankruptcy of Official Society" in C.L.R. James et al., *Facing Reality.* (Detroit: Bewick, 1974.) 42-64. [ed.]

in the United States. Such relations have stifled the political development of Black women who are tremendous revolutionary force in this society. Also, under the disguise of "Blackness" we have seen ambitious Black politicals engage in petty capitalist projects which are designed to maintain the wholesale exploitation of Black people. In other words, being "Black" cannot be the sole criteria for judgement.

Some Black politicals feel that they only have to study the Black struggle. But as George Jackson said in *Blood In My Eye*, "Each popular struggle must be analyzed historically to discover new ideas."[35] A study of revolutionary movements outside the United States will not only broaden our perspective but it will also give us insights on questions related to how we must organize ourselves.

We have to watch every new development in the world body politic. For a tremendous upsurge of oppressed people is taking place and literally wrecking the world market system. International capitalism is, therefore, in a desperate state of crisis. Profits are falling steadily and national economies are collapsing simultaneously. Along with these things has developed a full-scale "energy crisis" affecting all industrial countries.

Euro-American capitalists and their agents are running around hopelessly searching for a solution to the crisis and paralysis that is descending upon the social order. The mass of the population needs to know this. But more importantly, they need to know that things like the "energy crisis" are insoluble as long as the capitalist mode of production dominates the world body politic. They also need to know that millions of workers and peasants are rising up in direct opposition to the forces of oppression.

"This great humanity has cried enough." That was evident when the mass of the population in Chile went to the polls and voted for Salvadore Allende, an avowed socialist and Marxist, for president. The election of Allende represented something new in the development of the world. Never before had an avowed socialist come to power through the electoral process.

The violent overthrow of Allende's regime is only another example of how far the capitalists will go to save themselves. Although a military junta executed the coup, everyone knows that it was planned by the United States State Department and financed by American capital. Unfortunately,

35 George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye.* (New York: Random House,1972) 27. [ed.]

the Chilean masses were not sufficiently armed to defend their revolution. However, through the defeat of the Chilean workers and peasants, we have learned many lessons.

The most important lesson we have learned is that a revolution is helpless unless the mass of the population is sufficiently armed with both military and ideological weapons. For while the revolution is in progress, the counter-revolution is also in progress. But the counter-revolution cannot succeed in the face of the spontaneous upsurge of the mass of the population whenever the masses are adequately equipped to protect their revolution and they don't have the fetters of state bureaucracy upon their shoulders.

When the United States attacked Cuba in 1961 (the Bay of Pig's episode) Fidel Castro had to call upon the peasants and workers to defend the Cuban Revolution.[36] When the Portuguese launched an invasion against Guinea in November 1970, President Sekou Toure had to arm as many workers and peasants as he could and call upon the total population to defend the sovereignty of Guinea.[37] These are just two incidents in which we see spontaneity being applied to a given situation.

New universal-historical facts have shown, with no uncertainty, that spontaneity is absolutely necessary to bring about fundamental changes in our society. Black politicals, therefore, must grab this new universal conception and apply it in a scientific way to the problems, given the peculiar entanglement of the Black masses in the net of international capitalism. However, those problems have to be faced with sober senses to avoid panic and disintegration inside the Black movement.

That is exactly what the Black movement is confronted with now—panic and disintegration. Of course, there are some objective reasons for this and one has to always expect these things, but the degree of panic and disintegration taking place is an "abnormal" development when we look at the revolutionary potential of the Black masses. Particularly, when we

36 For an outstanding critical study of Castro's Cuba see Samuel Farber, *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011). [ed.]

37 In recent years new studies of Sekou Toure's Guinea have appeared for an English reading audience. See Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958.* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2005); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958.* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007). [ed.]

look at it in light of the strategic position Black people occupy in the cog-wheel of American capital.

The degree to which Black people have been integrated into industrial, military, educational, and political institutions poses a grave threat to American society. Although Black people resemble a captive nation on one hand, they are an integral part of the American body politic on the other hand. That is, the Black movement cannot be isolated or contained, whatever happens inside the "Ghetto" spreads rapidly and influences other developments in American society.

By 1976 it is estimated that 55 percent of the total population of about twelve major cities in the United States will be Black. This is significant because even though the numerical strength of Black people is small in relation to the total population—they are highly concentrated in the urban-industrial areas and are approaching an overwhelming majority. For instance, 60 percent of the inner city population in Detroit is already Black. Coupled with this is the fact that the Black masses in Detroit form one of the most explosive and revolutionary sections of the "Black Revolution" in America.

The international headquarters of the automobile industry is located in Detroit. In some automobile plants Black workers represent more than 70 percent of the work force.

This type of information is very, very important in determining our relative strength in relation to the whole process of production in this country. Also, in determining how we must move to effect the changes we seek.

In the coming decades we must call upon Black workers to utilize their clout. Throughout the sixties we saw our political strength in terms of racial solidarity, but we seldom saw the importance of Black unity in respect to our relation to the productive forces of society. That is, Black political leadership did not call upon workers to take positive action at the point of production. Such a step could have given us a decisive edge in certain battles around issues of community control.

Not too long ago, longshoremen were asked to refuse to unload shipments of chrome from Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) in protest to the super-exploitation of Blacks by a small white regime. In Baltimore and New Orleans longshoremen also responded to such a request in a very positive manner. They did not unload the chrome or any subsequent shipments

from Zimbabwe. That only goes to show us the level of consciousness of certain elements of the working class.

Now, it is quite obvious that Black women as an organized segment of the population are a very powerful and conscious force. However, no serious effort has been made to unleash the revolutionary energies of women. Usually Black women are classified as "supportive" elements and thrown into political cadres which stifle the political development and creativity of women. Consequently, one of our greatest, if not the greatest, sources of power has gone literally untapped.

That won't do! Women must organize and mobilize themselves like they have done in the past. Although it is seldom mentioned, women were in the forefront of some of the fiercest battles to establish "community control" in many localities during the 1960s. Quite often, however, Black politicals overlook the significant role women have played and are capable of playing. The general tendency today is to pay lip service to the importance of women and to shove the "Woman Question" off on aggressive women to deal with. But not only are women capable of providing leadership on the "Woman's Question," they are also very capable of providing leadership on all other political concerns.

Today, more than ever before, it is necessary to unleash those revolutionary energies which have been diverted and suppressed by capitalist society. Through the process of revolutionary struggle, those elements which form the movement below will organize themselves in quite unimaginable ways, to ensure the successful development of a new social order. Our task, therefore, is to discover ways to unleash the creativity and revolutionary energies of the Black masses. But that is not a task for a small band of men and women to undertake by themselves. That is a task which can only be accomplished through the collective thought and action of the revolutionary forces which make up the Black movement.

BEYOND MEASURE

C.L.R. James's Influence on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers

INTRODUCTION

C.L.R. James, through his persistent political activism and pioneering intellectual work spanning more than half a century, has influenced revolutionary consciousness and developments in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and North and South America in a way that is *beyond measure.* His influence on the many lives he touched can be likened to that of the artists he wrote about: Cezanne, Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Picasso, Raphael, and Shakespeare.[1]

To compare James's influence to that of supreme artists at this point in time perhaps overstates the case. Generations to come will debate this matter based on an assessment of the ongoing impact of James's writings. Without question, these constitute an important body of revolutionary ideas and thought for studying human civilization's continuous struggle to establish a worldwide social order based on democracy, freedom and respect for cultural diversity, rather than cultural domination, imperialism, and subordination.

James was born in 1901. Unlike many legendary figures, he lived a full life. One of his personal dreams, however, was not fulfilled. In 1978, James, who was acutely aware that in certain political activists' circles he had become a legend in his own lifetime, shared with a few of his confidants his wish to live to the year 2000. Eleven years later James died in England.

James never exaggerated his importance and it is not our aim here to make him out to be more than he is. Neither is it our intent here to exaggerate the importance of the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW or "the League"), which our discussion revolves around.

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1 For examples of James's art criticism see C.L.R. James, "Picasso and Jackson Pollock" In *The C.L.R. James Reader.* Anna Grimshaw, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) 405-410. [ed.]

The formation of the LRBW was much more than an event. It was the ideological, philosophical, and organizational high point of the movement of the 1960s, in terms of defining the Black struggle in the United States. It was an integral part of the international movement of the working class to emancipate itself and establish truly democratic societies.

The formation of the LRBW was a new sign of what was on the international horizon—the formation of Solidarity in Poland.

This is a matter of political analysis that can neither be proven or disproved. Thus, we are confronted with a difficulty of inquiry at the onset of this discussion in a twofold way.

First, how do we connect, determine, and penetrate the influence of James's personality to an unprecedented and short-lived revolutionary development like the formation of the LRBW, which took place in Detroit, Michigan in 1968, especially when that influence is mostly mediated and indirect?

Secondly, how do we probe the LRBW itself, from the standpoint that it represented much more than it appeared, when it emerged on the tails of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements?

These questions necessarily involve an unraveling of an organic complexity, not for academic reasons, but rather for analysis of certain developments and influences outside of traditional politics that have and will continue to shape the course of social movements in the United States in a revolutionary way.

To unravel something means there is an entanglement of knots that have to be penetrated and broken loose through a process of analysis. Our first knot is the man himself and the impact of his human interactions, political activism, and intellectual work. What manner of man was James? That is what we will first look at. Then we will examine at some length the social movement and political currents of the period, which engulfed both the emergence of the LRBW and James's conscious efforts to influence the course of developments of this rather unique and youthful organization. After that we will take a close look at the LRBW and how it evolved. What did the LRBW seek to accomplish and establish? What were its central doctrines? An immediate and critical question arises: Where did it fail and succeed?

The last knot we will tackle before our summation will be an accounting and critical assessment of James's specific view of the LRBW, and his

efforts to influence the direction the organization took in terms of bringing a wealth of practical, historical, and theoretical knowledge to the table for establishing and advancing policy, revolutionary ideas, and programs. What did James specifically attempt to do? Was he successful? If not, why? Or, exactly what went wrong? These are some of the pertinent questions which we will attempt to dutifully examine, not for the sake of mere intellectualism, but rather for insights into the future as it relates to the continuous evolutionary development, self-organization and independent initiatives of Black movements in the United States.

A SPIRIT OF THE AGE

Arguably, no political personality, scholar or writer of the 20th century has put his or her stamp on so many aspects of the social sciences in relation to political movements as C.L.R. James. This is now—slowly but surely—being recognized in the United States as a result of a renewed interest in James's writings and a research blitz covering all aspects of his historical, literary, philosophical, and theoretical contributions from various ideological perspectives and viewpoints.

Even though much is now known about James's character and work as a result of all the accolades he has recieved, he still remains an obscure figure in American history. The importance of his work is still known to only a small body of people. One reason is that his name is not connected with any major national or international celebrated event or movement in a way that grips national consciousness. He does not fall into the traditional category of "charismatic leader" or "head of state." Nor does he fall into the traditional category of a celebrated professor. As his long time comrade and friend, Martin Glaberman is quick to point out, James was no academic. He only was a professor for a relatively short while—but never went to college.

How then do we categorize James? Why should there be an ongoing interest in his life and works?

To give him his due is not a matter of falling prey to the cult of personality. World-renowned and distinguished intellectuals in their own right, like E.P. Thompson, will never quibble about this tribute. Talk to the West Indian novelist George Lamming, the author of *Natives of My Person*, and

he too will concur that James is the rarest of what the human intellect is capable of conquering.[2]

Without James's coaching, Eric Williams would have never produced *Capitalism & Slavery* the way it was written.[3] "The Doctor" (as Williams was called after Trinidad won its independence and he became head of State) obviously didn't forget this when James arrived at the airport in 1965 in his "native land" when Williams had him immediately placed under house arrest. This was the prelude to James's organization of the multiracial Workers and Farmers Party for his career's only electoral campaign.

Kwame Nkrumah, who led the "Ghana Revolution," which produced one of the first independent African states, already seemed to forget James's influence in 1945, when the 5th Pan African Congress was held and he (Nkrumah) was singled out as the most promising young African—born to carry the torch of African liberation.[4]

Had Nkrumah, who James called Francis, listened to his first mentor, and George Padmore ("the father of the African Movement" that swept through Africa in various forms from non-violent resistance movements to the Mau Mau), he may have been able to at least survive the relentless maneuver of British and U.S. imperialism, like Fidel Castro had managed to hold on to power and chart a new future for Cuba.

During his lifetime, James not only touched the lives of artists, historians, literary figures, philosophers, politicians, social scientists, etc., but also farmers, oil field and sugar workers, students and ordinary people across the diversity of cultural backgrounds.

Needless to say, James was a prolific writer. More importantly, he was a creative, independent and revolutionary thinker who never lost sight of recording, documenting, and analyzing the self-activity, self-organization, self-movement, independent initiatives, and creativity of ordinary human beings—be they "barefoot" men and women, serfs, peasants, slaves, or modern day proletarians (industrial workers). For James, the focus of intellectual inquiry was humanity's relentless struggle and quest for freedom

2 See EP Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class.* (New York: Pantheon, 1964); George Lamming, *Natives of My Person.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996). [ed.]

3 See Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery.* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press 1994). [ed.]

4 See C.L.R. James. *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution.* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co, 1977). [ed.]

and democracy as it manifested itself in the form of mass or social movements that, figuratively speaking, stripped the "Emperors" of oppression and exploitation of their clothes.

James's most celebrated work is indisputably *The Black Jacobins*, a history of Toussaint L' Ouverture and the San Domingo (Haitian) Revolution.[5] Fredric Warburg, the first publisher of this definitive study wrote about James in this way in his 1950 memoir, *Occupation for a Gentleman*: "James himself was one of the most delightful and easy going personalities I have known, colorful in more sense than one. A dark skinned West Indian Negro from Trinidad he stood six feet three inches in his socks and was noticeably good-looking. His memory was extraordinary."[6]

"He could quote not only passages from the Marxist classics but long extracts from Shakespeare, in a soft lilting English which was a delight to hear. Immensely amiable, he loved the fleshpots of capitalism, fine cooking, fine clothes, fine furniture, and beautiful women, without a trace of the guilty remorse to be expected from a seasoned warrior of the class war. He was brave," continued Warburg.[7]

"Night after night he would address meetings in London and the provinces, denouncing the crimes of the bloodthirsty Stalin, until he was hoarse and his wonderful voice a mere croaking in the throat. The communists who heckled him would have torn him limb from limb, had it not been for the ubiquity of the police and their insensitivity to propaganda of whatever hue." Warburg states further: "If you told him of some new communist argument, he would listen with a smile of infinite tolerance on his dark face, wag the index finger of his right hand solemnly, and announce in an understanding tone—'we know them, we know them' —as of a man who has plumbed human wickedness to its depth and forgiven it, since man even in wickedness is pitiable."[8]

"If politics was his religion and Marx his god, if literature was his passion and Shakespeare his prince among writers, cricket was his beloved activity," Warburg concludes.[9]

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5 See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins.* 2nd Edition. (New York: Vintage, 1963). [ed.]
6 Frederic Warburg. *Occupation for a Gentleman.* (London: Hutchinson, 1959) 214-215. [ed.]
7 *Ibid.*
8 *Ibid.*
9 *Ibid.*

James took pride in admitting this on every occasion he had the opportunity to discuss his semi-autobiographical work, *Beyond A Boundary,* in which he gave the game of cricket new meaning as an integral part of West Indians' cultural life and social development.[10]

Cricket was not the only sport James took interest in. During the 1970s, while living at the Chaselton building in Washington, DC, James cultivated an interest in American baseball too. For him, that seemed the appropriate thing to do since cricket wasn't a popular sport in the U.S. Vida Blue became his man. He religiously kept up with Blue's wins and losses, earned run average, as well as other baseball statistics.

More importantly, immediately upon his return to the United States, he made it his business to keep up with every aspect of the political advances and changing realities of the Black community. And, quite often, he went beyond the "call of duty" in his efforts to establish as many contacts, as humanly possible with all the ideological tendencies and militant forces that had emerged on the scene, advancing the cause of Black emancipation during the period of his exile.[11]

On many occasions, as his doctors will attest, health-wise, James was in poor shape to travel, but his obsession with feeling the pulse of what Black activists, students, and women were thinking, doing, and saying would not allow him to refuse, postpone, or cancel a lecture or speaking engagement, unless he was absolutely confined to bed by his doctors.

"Lord have mercy. These fellows want me to come and speak. They are going to kill me," he would say, with a croak and a smile, bordering on a tease-type of laugh, as he crawled out of bed to prepare for whatever engagement he had committed himself.

James was a man that always wanted to know what ordinary working class people thought. For him, that was the class that fundamentally and ultimately mattered, the class whose movement had to be constantly and continuously studied, watched, and analyzed in every industrial and

10 See C.L.R. James, *Beyond A Boundary.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). [ed.]

11 James lived in the United States for two distinct periods. His first American years were during the Age of the CIO (1938-1953), before he was coerced into leaving, as an undesirable immigrant, during the McCarthy era. His second American sojourn (1969-1979) was as a mentor and colleague of the Black Power and Black Studies movements. [ed.]

peasant-based society from the standpoint of human civilization's quest for freedom since the days of Antiquity.

Whenever James would come into one-on-one contact with young activists, particularly from the southern part of the United States, he would seize the opportunity to ask them, "What do your parents do? What type of foods do they eat? Do they eat grits? What about salt pig tails and smoked meats like ham hocks, and neck bones?" That was the manner of man he was. He did not divorce politics from everyday life.[12]

James first came to the United States in 1938 to help the Trotskyist movement...formulate and develop a position on the "Negro Question." He was invited for discussion by Leon Trotsky, who had based himself in Mexico in an unsuccessful effort to escape the hands of assassination by the henchmen of Joseph Stalin.[13] At that time, the Black movement in the United States had yet to arrive as the type of mass movement that this nation and the whole world witnessed from 1954 to 1974. James knew, however, through his observations, interactions, and studies (as early as 1948, when he presented a comprehensive statement to a gathering of James Cannon's Socialist Workers Party in the United States titled "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States"), that something was brewing below the surface, inside the African American community, that would some day explode into a mass movement like a volcanic eruption. On the heels of the United States Supreme Court ruling, Brown vs. Board of Education, outlawing racial segregation in schools, the lava of social movement flowed from the deepest pits of racial oppression in the South, as James predicted.

"The Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle has a vitality and a validity of its own...it has an organic political perspective along which it is traveling to one degree or another, everything shows that at the present time it is traveling with great speed and vigor," James argued.[14] This was a warning to the traditional leftist forces, including Black radi-

12 This reveals the influence on James of Karl Marx's *A Workers Inquiry.* (Detroit: Bewick, 1973). [ed.]

13 See Leon Trotsky, *On Black Nationalism & Self-Determination.* (New York: Pathfinder, 1992). [ed.]

14 C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States." In *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings, 1939-1949.* Scott McLemee and Paul LeBlanc, eds. (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1994) 180. [ed.]

cals, who functioned under the rhetorical banner, "Black and White, Unite and Fight," but who, according to James, believed that the independent struggles of Black people had not much more than "an episodic value" and could "constitute a great danger" if it did not subordinate itself to the organized labor movement. "Anyone who knows them, who knows their history is able to talk to them intimately, watches them at their theaters, watches them at their dances, watches them at their churches, reads their press with a discerning eye—he will recognize that it is necessary to have a new concept about what Black people will do in the United States," James further explained.[15]

Ernest Rice McKinney, a brilliant African American labor leader, and, at the time, a very influential organizer and personality inside Max Shactman's Workers Party, disagreed with James's viewpoint. Neither James nor McKinney, however, allowed their ideological differences to stand in the way of teaming up to assist the agricultural workers who initiated the Southeast Missouri Sharecroppers' Strike of 1941.[16] James never attempted to upstage his comrade in this regard. Whenever James discussed his involvement in this sharecroppers strike he always seemed to downplay his role in an effort to write McKinney's name into the pages of history. That was the type of person he was.

When James first came to the United States he already had a number of what were to later be viewed as precedent-setting accomplishments. He, alone with his countryman, Alfred H Mendes, had organized and published one of the first West Indian literary journals produced for and by native West Indian intellectuals, *The Beacon.* This particular accomplishment makes James one of the fathers of West Indian literature.[17]

To his credit was an early West Indian biography, *The Life of Captain Cipriani* (1933), a fragment of which was published as a pamphlet, "The Case for West Indian Self-Government."[18] Contrary to what some intel-

15 *Ibid,* 187.

16 For an edited selection of James's journalism on the sharecroppers strike see C.L.R. James, "With the Sharecroppers." In *C.L.R. James On The 'Negro Question.'* Scott McLemee ed. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996). [ed.]

17 For a study of James's early contribution to Caribbean literature see Reinhard Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen-Thirties.* (New York: Greenwood, 1988). [ed.]

18 See C.L.R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani.* (Nelson, Lancashire: Coulton, 1932); C.L.R. James, *The Case for West Indian Self-Government.* (London: Hogarth

lectuals may say, it was this particular work, not James's most celebrated and popular *The Black Jacobins*, in which he clearly had Caribbean independence on his mind. As he himself pointed out on numerous occasions in lectures and in speeches, the liberation of Africa was his foremost focus when he produced his monumental study on Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution, the first and only successful slave revolt in the New World.

C.L.R. James (writing as J.R. Johnson) was always a practical politician as well as a theoretician. Around 1940, he and Raya Dunayevskaya (Freddie Forest) and others organized an intellectual faction of some seventy people, known as the Johnson-Forest Tendency. This group was first lodged inside the Workers Party (WP), which was then headed by Max Shactman, and it set about the task of working out independent theoretical perspectives.[19]

In 1947, the Johnson-Forest Tendency left the WP over policy issues and joined the Socialist Workers Party. James became the second most influential leader of the Workers Party. Max Shactman was the person at the helm, but, as Grace Lee Boggs so correctly states in *Conversations in Maine*, "Shactman was the one who held the party together by his rhetoric but C.L.R. held it together by ideas." [20]

Speaking about the collaborative and independent work the Johnson-Forest Tendency undertook, as a result of James's leadership, Grace Lee Boggs further noted: "We carried on studies that were fantastic: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx's *Capital* in light of the development of German Classical Philosophy and English Political Economy, dialectics, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Melville, the Abolitionists, Negro History, Marcus Garvey. We did a huge intellectual work during these years because we thought it was necessary to the American Revolution, and because we saw the American working class as heirs to all this. Raya Dunayevskaya is still living on that work today. Only C.L.R. could have given us the leadership in this."[21]

Press, 1933). [ed.]

19 See Peter Drucker, *Max Shactman and His Left.* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1994). [ed.]

20 James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs with Freddy and Lyman Paine, *Conversations in Maine.* (Boston: South End Press, 1978) 284. [ed.]

21 *Ibid,* 285.

in this..."[21]

Under James's leadership the Johnson-Forest Tendency undertook some "colossal" intellectual tasks. They did a thorough study of the Russian Question which has yet to be fully appreciated and surpassed. They also translated and published parts of Karl Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 from the original German text.[22] The climax of James and his colleagues theoretical work was in no uncertain terms the production of *State Capitalism & World Revolution* in which they made clear that however great the differences may be between the economy of the United States and Russia, the fundamental laws of capitalism were operative and prevailed in both countries.[23]

"What the American workers are revolting against since 1936 and holding at bay, this and nothing else but this has overwhelmed the Russian proletariat," wrote James in collaboration with two other moving spirits and workhorses of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee (later married to James Boggs). "The rulers of Russia performed the same functions as are performed by Ford, General Motors, the coal operators and their bureaucratic staffs," they declared. "Not inefficiency of bureaucrats, not consumption but capital accumulation in its specifically capitalist manner, this is the analysis of the Russian economy" James and his associates pointed out.[24]

State Capitalism & World Revolution was first published almost a half-century ago. If we look closely at what is happening in Russia today we will see James and his colleagues were absolutely correct when they stated: "To think that the struggle in Russia is over consumption not only strikes at the whole theory of the relationship of the superstructure to the productive mechanism. In practice, today, the crisis in Russia is manifestly the crisis in production." [25]

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21 *Ibid,* 285.

22 See C.L.R. James, "On Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts." in C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory: Selected Writings.* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984) 65-72. [ed.]

23 C.L.R. James et al., *State Capitalism & World Revolution.* (Chicago: Charles H Kerr, 1986). [ed.]

24 *Ibid,* 41-43, 48.

25 *Ibid,* 11-16.

In 1953 James's work in the United States came to a temporary halt when he was shipped off to Ellis Island by Federal authorities to await deportation like so many other foreign born persons who were branded communists, and undesirables, and denied U.S. citizenship during the McCarthy era—the period of the "Red Scare."

While incarcerated on Ellis Island, James wrote *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways,* a critical analysis of Herman Melville's classic Moby Dick and submitted it, figuratively, to the United States government as his application for citizenship.[26] "Anyone who understands Herman Melville's Moby Dick cannot be considered un-American," James would wittingly tell his audiences whenever he had an occasion to talk about his work on Melville. That was the manner of man he was and never ceased to be.

THE GENERAL AND SPECIFIC SITUATION

When James was allowed to return to the United States in 1968 as a visiting lecturer, he found the political climate and situation radically different from what it was in 1953 when he was forced to leave. First, radical thinkers were no longer being treated as outcast lepers. They were in demand. Second, and infinitely more important, the Black movement, in no uncertain terms, had become the revolutionary consciousness and vanguard of social movement in the United States. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) was just emerging. The slogan "Black Power" already had become, as James would readily say, "the political banner of the Black movement" on all fronts. It was indeed a new day.

There was a general recognition crossing ethnic, race, sex, creed, regional and class lines that the long drawn out Civil Rights struggle from 1954 to 1964 had been a necessary phase in the development of the Black movement in the United States, but it was not sufficient in terms of transforming American society. It's aim and accomplishment as a movement was primarily limited to dethroning segregation. Something more was needed and a new militancy was on the horizon.

Unexpectedly with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a symbolic and significant victory, came the urban rebellions anointing James

26 See C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways.* Introduction by Donald Pease. (Hanover: University of New England Press, 2001). [ed.]

Baldwin's work *The Fire Next Time.*[27] These spontaneous political explosions shook the foundations of American society. Harlem, Cleveland, Newark, Watts, etc. went up in flames. The most devastating to property and threatening to the political apparatus was to be the precursor of the LRBW—the 1967 Detroit Rebellion. To use an expression James loved, these rebellions came "like a thief in the night." The following is an extensive selection from James's Facing Reality group pamphlet, published in 1967, in response to the Detroit rebellion:

> The Detroit revolt of July 1967 and the battles that were taking place at the same time all across the country, mark a new stage in the Negro struggle. These are not just a repetition of what has been happening since Watts.
>
> Detroit has been called an integrated riot. If integrated looting and sniping are supposed to mean it is not a question of race, then it is false. Detroit was a racial explosion, initiated and carried through predominantly by Negroes. But it was also a question of class. Except for minor incidents, blacks and whites did not battle each other. Both battled businessmen and police.
>
> What is important in this for the future of the Negro movement is not that there was any united effort between blacks and whites or that there was any lessening of race hatred and tensions among whites. There was not. What is important is that Detroit showed that substantial sections of the white working class (the Southern whites of Corktown, for example), have no interest in defending the existing society and are ready to work to overthrow it.
>
> These things could come out in Detroit because of the nature of the Detroit ghetto and how it differs from Watts and Harlem. In Detroit the ghetto is continuous and it dominates the whole central city and extends into almost all its corners. It includes within itself and borders on significant integrated areas with varied class character from working class to upper class.

27 See James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time.* (New York: Vintage, 1993). [ed.]

WORKERS WERE WRITTEN OFF

The liberals thought that this would have the effect of preventing major uprisings because the better-off sections of the Negro community would have a restraining effort. They were proved wrong because the total Negro ghetto provided strength, not restraint. The militant sectarians share with liberals the idea that money can bribe the oppressed. They wrote off the Negro industrial workers, thousands upon thousands of whom have good seniority in the three dollar and hour auto industry.

It is a peculiar idea that because a man has won in bitter struggle an income that gives him a house, a car, a refrigerator, and a television set, that he will therefore accept more easily being treated as less than a man. This idea was proved wrong in Detroit. Workers at Ford, Chrysler and General Motors took part.

REFORMS REACH DEAD END

Also proved wrong in Detroit was the idea that a liberal, dedicated Negro Democrat like young Congressman John Conyers is in some way better than a Machine politician like the old hack, Dawson of Chicago. The total lack of contact between men like Conyers and the people of 12th Street, of Linwood Ave, of Dexter Blvd., he is supposed to represent demonstrated what it means to be a part of the two-party machine that runs this segregated society. In his complete surprise and ignorance he was joined by Buddy Battle, Nelson "Jack" Edwards, Horace Sheffield, and the other Negro porkchoppers of the Trade Union Leadership Council. The masses of the Negro people cannot be bribed by a few Congressional seats that are incorporated into the Establishment. And Negro workers cannot be bribed by a few posts to Negro porkchoppers who administer the union contract against them.

The incorporation of a small section of the Negro population into the power structure does not lessen the revolutionary capacity of the overwhelming majority who are left out.

The power structure itself showed signs of cracking under the pressure of the events. Public disputes between politicians, indecision and conflict among themselves, were part of the response to the revolt that swept across the nation at the end of July 1967.

In France, students and workers also had taken to the streets with mass mobilization campaigns. President De Gaulle of France was so frightened by the mass mobilization of students and workers that he left the country to consult with his generals to see whether they would support him and his government if they were overthrown or forced into exile by what appeared then to be the encroaching French Revolution of the twentieth century.

Earlier in the 1960s the Algerian Revolution was in full progress challenging French colonial rule and imperialism. The African liberation movements in Angola, Namibia, South Africa (Azania) and Zimbabwe were also in full gear.

Without question all of these events were fueling and reinforcing the new black militancy in the United States with international consciousness.[28]

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

By 1964 the Black movement already had begun to internationalize itself and move towards a more class conscious and worldwide perspective. The success of the Cuban Revolution and the Ghana Revolution and the Vietnam War were significant contributing factors along with the rise of the notion of the "Third World." This was embodied in the formation and activities of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and the publication of a forgotten magazine called *Black America.*[29]

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28 "Detroit: The July Days." (Detroit: Facing Reality 1967). [ed.]

29 See Muhammad Ahmad, Ernie Allen, John Bracey, eds. *The Black Power Movement Part 3: Revolutionary Action Movement Papers, 1962-1996.* Microfilm. (Bethesda: Lexis-

Two years after the formation of RAM, the words "Black Power" were to flow out of the mouth of Willie Ricks, one of the many unsung heroes of the Civil Rights movement during a protest demonstration in Albany, Georgia. Almost simultaneously, the Black Panther Party was born in Oakland, California declaring the right of the Black community to arm itself for self-defense, under the banner "All Power to the People! All Power to Black People!"

At the level of dialectical imagination, the impact on consciousness seemed to re-echo, in some small way, Lenin and the 1917 Russian Revolution slogan "All Power to the Soviets." The contrast between these urban explosions in the North (twenty to thirty in less than twelve months) as compared to demonstrations, protest marches, sit-ins, wade-ins, etc. in the largely rural South could not be more sharp. The Southern voting and other desegregation issues could be coped with by the introduction and enactment of legislation. But there were no legislative remedies for resolving the crisis posed by the urban uprisings that followed in the North after the passage of new civil rights laws. The authorities were so caught off guard that they even complained of not knowing who to negotiate with in an effort to stabilize the situation. This is an indication that the leadership of the Black movement was being produced spontaneously, and on the spot, by the movement below, and that there were many unidentifiable leaders, most of whom still remain unknown.

Not only were local, state, and federal authorities caught off guard but also the traditional Civil Rights leadership, and the "Old" and "New" leftist forces that claimed to be in the "know" of analyzing social movements. We are mentioning this strictly from the standpoint of the *preparedness* and *unpreparedness* of organized intellectual forces to, if nothing else, assist in properly analyzing the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, and to speculate about the future.

James would definitely appreciate this point because as early as 1963, writing from London, he had encouraged his colleagues in Detroit to prepare a comprehensive new internal statement on the historical and current development of the Black movement with an eye to what was to come in the future. At the time, the Hegelian Doctrine of Essence was governing

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Nexis, 2002). [ed.]

his thinking.[30]

"The Essence of a thing is that it has to move." The Civil Rights movement had to move from the largely rural South to the urban centers of the North. This was more a factual matter for James than a matter of speculative thought. That is to say, when he began pressing his colleagues in the United States to prepare a new statement on the development of the Black movement in the United States he clearly recognized that the movement was no longer Southern but national, and the nation and race had become intertwined.

When nation and race are almost totally intertwined, events move with a rapidity in a variety of directions on issues which have been separated for almost a hundred years. For example, the Kennedy assassination and Malcolm X's infamous response "Chickens come home to roost," split the Nation of Islam and further propelled Malcolm into the spotlight of being the most influential potential opponent of Martin Luther King's advocacy of non-violent resistance, and the Southern Christian Leadership Council's domination of the Civil Rights movement.

Another concrete example of what happens when a nation and race are almost totally intertwined is what occurred with the birth of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), as a new force on the American Left in general. SDS produced the forcible confrontation of white students with the police, culminating in the Kent State Massacre which the Ohio National Guard carried out in the name of "law and order" against unarmed college students.

It is against this backdrop that the League of Revolutionary Black Workers emerges on the scene as a radical political force to be reckoned with.

THE BIRTH OF THE LEAGUE REVISITED

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) grew out of the self-movement and self-organization of Black workers in the automobile plants of Detroit. It was no historical accident that the birth of the LRBW took place in a Chrysler plant. As early as the 1950s, James and his colleagues speculated in their collaborative work on American civilization that the opportunity to work out independent methods of struggle were

30 See C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics.* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1971) 74-125. [ed.]

most favorable at the Chrysler plants on the East side of Detroit.

From the beginning, the Chrysler plants always had the smallest contract. These plants were originally organized one-by-one by the workers themselves. As compared to General Motors and Ford, in the original sitdowns there were a relatively small number of professional leaders in the labor movement.

The auto plants were not isolated but surrounded by the homes of the workers. James and his colleagues documented that, during the second World War, new layers of Black workers entered these plants and have remained there until today. Further, the Correspondence group recorded that the speed of these Blacks in taking united action independently of the union apparatus to fight any specific grievances was the envy of white workers. Black workers were fully mobilized at all times to respond to any suspicion of discrimination. Supervisors lived in continual fear that they would offend a single person of color and thereby precipitate a work stoppage. In this way, the sensitivity of Blacks to all infractions of their rights placed them in the vanguard of the workers in fighting management on the job.[31] This came to fruition with the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

The origins of the League itself can be traced back to May of 1967, when a small group of Black activists in Detroit—Mike Hamlin, John Watson, Luke Trip, Ken Cockrel, John Williams, General Baker, and others decided to begin publishing a Black community newspaper called the *Inner City Voice*. The first issue of the *Voice* was published in October, 1967, approximately three months after Detroit went up in flames. The League itself had not yet been conceived as an organization.

The actual birth of the League began with the spontaneous protest and walkout of Black workers at Chrysler's Hamtramck Assembly Plant on May 2, 1968 and the formation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) which occurred in the immediate aftermath of what was a long overdue "wildcat strike." Some 4,000 workers walked away from Chrysler's assembly line—defying union leadership as well as management—in protest against the terrible working conditions they encoun-

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31 See C.L.R. James, *American Civilization*. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993); Martin Glaberman, *Punching Out & Other Writings*. (Chicago: Charles H Kerr, 2002); Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes*. (Detroit: Bewick, 1980); "A Study of American Civilization." *Correspondence*. 2.13 (April 1956) 1-4. [ed.]

tered daily.

The Dodge workers' movement quickly spread to other plants and industries. More specifically, DRUM served as the catalyst for the Eldon Axle Revolutionary Union Movement (ELRUM) and the Ford Revolutionary Union Movements and other similar formations. Health workers even got into the act by organizing themselves under the "revolutionary union" banner too. The closest federation of Black workers resembling anything comparable to the League was the Industrial Trade Advisory Council (ITAC) of Jamaica[32], which, unlike the League, defined itself and functioned as a trade union movement.

The League was radically different from a trade union in that its emphasis was on totally transforming the community. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin point this out in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying (A Study in Urban Revolution).*[33]

The League was also radically different from any civil rights or Black political organization of the period in that it grew directly out of the antagonistic and contradictory relations between labor and capital at the point of production. Even though it was a local organization, its tentacles extended, as we shall see later, throughout the United States in embryonic form and internationally.

The formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers scared the daylights out of the United Auto Workers (UAW), and the management of the auto industry as a whole, as well as politicians and police authorities. The UAW itself was so scared that it circulated a letter denouncing the League as a racist organization.

What made the League as an organization so threatening? As we attempt to answer this question, we must keep in mind that the League did not control a single local union, and even though they did run slates for union positions, that was definitely not the primary function of the organization. The League was a propaganda, education, and agitation organization.

It is important to note here that when the League emerged, Detroit

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32 See Independent Trade Union Advisory Council (ITAC). *Forward to Freedom.* (Kingston, Jamaica: ITAC, 1970). [ed.]

33 See Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin. *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying.* (Boston: South End Press 1998). [ed.]

was the "industrial capital of America" and the home of the United Auto Workers (UAW) which had the reputation of inarguably being the most progressive and unsegregated union in the nation. Many of the local UAW unions were under Black leadership. This would indicate that the dominant issue could no longer be and was not that of dethroning segregation.

To understand what made the League so threatening we must again look at the general setting in which the organization bloomed. The inner-city population of Detroit was sixty percent Black. In some automobile plants Black workers represented more than seventy percent of the workforce, and by all yardsticks of political analysis they were the most rebellious section of the workforce in Detroit. The white student movement had concentrated their activities against the Vietnam War, etc. The attempt to reform the Democratic Party in 1968 had failed. The cultural radicalism of the youth of that period could be, to some extent, smiled at by the authorities. But what the urban uprisings had posed was the imponderable and seemingly insoluble question of the period. What would the Black urban people do next? It was this particular question which riveted academicians, culturalists, public policy advisors, politicians, and police authorities.

It was because of what has been described, coming to a head, in the midst of various sources that the League's birth became so threatening to the economic and political power structure, most notably the labor bureaucracy.

Detroit specifically had a young, liberal, new fresh face, Mayor Cavanaugh, who had a cash pipeline directly to Washington, which pumped millions of federal dollars into the city to curtail the new Black militancy. What was happening in Detroit was obviously not civil rights demands but a whole rejection of welfare state capitalism.

Let it be remembered that there were sources of the Civil Rights movement: Brown vs. Board of Education, the literacy campaigns in the thirteen southern states which were led by Septima Clark, a new young president John F. Kennedy, the formation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), etc.

The point we are driving at is the League represented something new. No one anticipated or thought about the formation of a principled Black working class organization and the impact it might have. At the time, the eyes of more people in and around Detroit were on the activities of the ris-

ing white folk hero John Sinclair and his Guitar Army[34] than were on the self-movement and self-organization of the Black proletariat there.

Few people paid attention to the little mimeographed tabloid newspaper General Baker and Chuck Wooten published in the name of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement.

The formation of the League was, thus, a shocker to the imagination on a host of practical and theoretical fronts. First, it was not a Civil Rights organization, a traditional trade union or leftist party. Second, unlike the Black Panthers, it was not a "street people" organization. Rather it was a Black worker-intellectual combination, whose legitimacy did not spring from or depend on the involvement of Black religious leaders, prominent middle class Black professionals or liberal whites. Third, the League was not dependent on an external or radical intelligentsia like the Communist Party, Progressive Labor Party, or the Socialist Workers Party.

Unlike most Black community organizations it did not seek government funding. Perhaps most important for analysis is the recognition that the League did not depend on unions as unions. As a matter of fact the League called for what no working class organization had ever called for: community control not only of schools, neighborhoods, city government, and the police, but also community control of the labor bureaucracy.

THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Let's look back in history for a moment. The Black movement in the United States from slavery to the present has had a certain rhythm and various forms of revolts have maintained cultural continuity. There was the Underground Railroad and the formation of *Freedom's Journal.* There was David Walker's *Appeal* calling for a massive slave insurrection. There was the intervention of the slaves in the Civil War which took the form of what W.E.B. Du Bois correctly characterized and described as a general strike, in his unsurpassed work, *Black Reconstruction in America.*[35]

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34 John Sinclair. *Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings.* (New York: Douglas Book Corp, 1972). [ed.]

35 See Winston James ed., *The Struggles of John Brown Wusswurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan African Pioneer, 1799-1851.* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal.* Charles M. Wiltse, ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1965); W.E.B. Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction in America,* 1860-1880. (New York: Atheneum, 1985). [ed.]

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, as early as 1866 to be more precise, there was the self-organization and self-mobilization of Black longshoreman, which took the form of labor unions and protective associations. Such organizations came in existence in all of the seaport towns along the Southeastern Atlantic coast: Charleston, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Forida; Savanna, Georgia; Wilmington, North Carolina; etc.

The self-organization and self-mobilization of the Black working class continued throughout the Reconstruction periods. In the late 1880s and the early 1890s the Colored Farmers Alliance, which claimed a membership of more than a million persons, rose to be a significant force in the Populist Movement. During this period Black workers also rose to the forefront of general strikes in New Orleans and Savannah through their own independent labor organization.[36] It's worth noting for informational and research purposes that a body of Black workers in Savannah created the *Labour Recorder*, a newspaper whose policy was to only allow workers to contribute to its pages. That was an historical, precedent-setting event.

The "Back to Africa" question resurfaced repeatedly throughout the 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century, however, there was a general consensus among Black people that mass emigration to Africa was a totally unrealistic proposition.

As we entered the most tortured century—the 20th century—with respect to the development of unleashing of the most devastating technological and scientific instruments of mass destruction, the Niagara Movement under the leadership of W.E.B. Du Bois gave rise to the formation of the NAACP.[37] The next historical precedent is the Marcus Garvey Movement of the 1920s and the Universal Negro Improvement Association which spearheaded the first mass movement of Blacks in mostly urban areas.[38] Of course, the next mass movement of Black people was the Civil

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36 Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet.* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003) 431-439. See also Gerald Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt.* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005). [ed.]

37 See Adolph Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought.* (New York: Oxford, 1997); David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919.* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993); Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois.* (New York: Shocken, 1990).[ed.]

38 See Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.* (Dover: The Majority

Rights movement.

Until the emergence of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the only Black working class organization in recorded history to attempt to put its stamp on any aspect of civil rights was the Black Pullman Porters under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph.[39]

Thus, there is no historical precedent we can reference to account for the League. It was a new form of organization, which by its very nature, integrated race and class issues. Most, if not all, of the prominent leadership figures were or had been auto workers.

This is significant in that the Civil Rights movement did not produce any prominent Black proletarian figures in any communities to which we can point.

Whereas the Black Panthers believed that only the "street people" could take on the establishment, the League believed, and correctly so, that only the "plant people" (proletarians), workers at the point of production, could take on the establishment.[40]

This ideological clash between the League and the Panthers remained

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Press, 1976); Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey.* (Baton Rouge: Lousiana State University Press, 1991); Rupert C. Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion.* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988); Colin Grant, *Negro With A Hat: the Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey.* (New York: Oxford, 2008). [ed.]

39 See Andrew E. Kersten, *A. Philip Randolph: A Life in the Vanguard.* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007); Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997); Joseph F. Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar: A Documentary History and Analysis of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989). [ed.]

40 The author is addressing a political dilemma. There was concern that the militant "street people" would be encouraged by the Black Panthers to pick up the gun in a premature and disorganized suicidal insurrection. Mohammed's critique of the Panthers was not "vanguard" minded merely because he was concerned with the relation of discipline to spontaneity in terms of armed struggle.

The point was to think about the type of direct self-government and reorganization of society, particularly of the economy, that could be achieved by taking over industrial workplaces. Narrowly defining this as "the point of production" can lead to undervaluation of initiatives for social reproduction the Panthers achieved in the realm of judicial affairs, copwatch programs, and community survival programs such as providing healthcare and breakfast for children. All of these tasks are part of a program of popular self-management when done in a disciplined fashion. [ed.]

an unsettled interaction between the two organizations because it was a question that never had to be settled on the spot—just clarified.

PRINCIPLED CLASS LINE POLITICS

The League was the only organization in the whole Black movement that evolved from the point of production and consistently adhered to the notion of class struggle and attempted to formulate a praxis on the interplay between race and class in a concrete way. In this regard, there is one unique example of political activity that we can point to, without challenge, that illustrates and illuminates the distinct quality of the League's natural orientation versus other Black radical organizations.

The first and perhaps most significant is the community-wide legal defense campaign the League mounted to free James Johnson, a Black worker at the Eldon Axle Plant, who went momentarily berserk, took a gun into the plant and shot his supervisor, and two other people. The legal case, handled by Ken Cockrel, was based on the claim of "temporary insanity," caused by working conditions. The trial culminated when the jury was taken on a tour of the plant, for research purposes, and emerged believing that toiling in that workplace would try anyone's mental health. Cockrel, who sat on the Executive Board of the League, and the organization's leadership, were not satisfied with this extraordinary legal victory. On the basis of the verdict, Johnson, they proposed, should be entitled to workmen's compensation, just as any other worker who was injured on the job, even though he had been committed to a mental institution after the verdict, which was not guilty by reason of insanity.

The League's defense campaign to have Johnson compensated for the mental anguish, pain and sufferings he underwent as a result of the dehumanizing working conditions he with which he had to cope, in the Eldon Plant was successful. They established a precedent in law and legal theory. This case was qualitatively different from the legal defense funds to free Ben Chavis and the "Wilmington Ten," Bobby Seale, Huey P. Newton, Angela Davis, Rap Brown, George Jackson and hundreds of lesser known people, whom the Black movement defined as political prisoners.

James was aware of this and all the other distinct qualities of the League we have mentioned. He was aware of much more. He knew he was the "link between the Old World and the New," a source of information and knowledge. During the life of the LRBW, he received regular brief-

ings from various sources on the dynamics of the League, and what it was confronted with, internally and externally, as it attempted to consolidate its influence and power as an authentic and genuine Black working class organization.

There were two sources James relied on most heavily and religiously for information about the League: (1) The Marcus Garvey Institute based in Lansing, Michigan and (2) the Caribbean Unity Conference which was housed on 14th Street in Washington, DC. These two organizations were not only one in spirit but also in actuality. James forged a unity between these groups that provided him with a reliable organizational base and pipeline to penetrate and influence most, if not all, the political tendencies and new social forces that he, in his wisdom, deemed important.

James was a founding member and honorary chairperson of the Caribbean Unity Conference. Under his directive, Tony Ferguson and Valerie Andrew were charged with the responsibility of doing research on the League and disseminating information about the organization's activities to political groupings in Antigua, Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and to other organizations in the non-English speaking islands and territories that they were in touch with.

At James's request, the Garvey Institute sent him regular reports on the League's activities and arranged private meetings between him and various members of the League who were in the ranks of leadership, like Modibo Kadalie[41], the head of the Highland Park component of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

The Garvey Institute was an ideal pipeline to the League for James because one of the organization's components, the Pan African Institute housed in Pontiac, Michigan was composed of young activists who were largely children of Detroit's Black working class community and "die-hard" members of the League, like Kofi Natambu (Michael Ray). They not only kept James informed about the League's activities but also looked to him for guidance.

All of the initial organizers and leadership cadres of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers had been exposed, if not influenced to some degree or another, to James's writings and view through the activities of the

41 See Modibo Kadalie. *Internationalism, Pan Africanism and the Struggle of Social Classes.* (Savannah: One Quest Press, 2000). [ed.]

Facing Reality Publishing Committee. Some of the leadership forces had taken classes conducted by George Rawick, a close friend and colleague of James, who taught at Wayne State University. Some of them also had taken classes on Marxism conducted by Martin Glaberman, who along with his wife Jessie, established Bewick Publications to insure among other things, that the work of James and the Johnson-Forest Tendency stayed in print.

"When the League was born you couldn't be in the center of radical politics in Detroit and not at least know of C.L.R. James," Norman Richmond stated emphatically in an interview in 1993. Richmond was one of the League members who wrote regular columns on the African liberation movements for the *Inner City Voice* and a Canadian based tabloid called *Contrast.*[42]

James's *A History of Pan African Revolt*[43] was one of Richmond's bibles; and, even today, though he still disagrees with James on certain aspects of political analysis, he doesn't hesitate to pay homage to James for having broadened his and other League members' thinking. "He moved some of us away from the narrow limits of Black Nationalism," said Richmond, while recalling that James autographed a copy of his book for him and then proceeded to engage him in a discussion on the music genius of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Max Roach, Bob Marley, etc.

Whenever James met privately with any members of the League he expressed deep concerns, not about various Black Nationalist tendencies that were sprouting inside the League, but about the organization's executive leadership becoming too absorbed into the treacherous waters of Marxist-Leninism, and Maoism.[44] James knew the ideological and theoretical pitfalls of these waters well; and, he was always quick to remind

42 For more on Norman O. Richmond and the link between Canada and Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers, see Chris Harris, "Canadian Black Power, Organic Intellectuals and the War of Position in Toronto, 1965-1975." In *The Sixties in Canada: A Turbulent and Creative Decade.* M. Athena Paleologu, ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009) 324-339. [ed.]

43 C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan African Revolt.* Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012. [ed.]

44 James obviously had a unique brand of revolutionary libertarian Marxism that, while at his best advocated direct democracy and workers self-management, was uncritically fond of Lenin. He generally was not fond of Maoism, though later in life his opposition became less strident. See the chapter on James and China in Matthew Quest. *In The Shadow of State Power: C.L.R. James, Direct Democracy and National Liberation Struggles.* (Atlanta: On Our Own Authority! Publishing, 2013). [ed.]

young upstarts in the movement that he had studied Hegel, Marx, Lenin and every aspect of the Russian Revolution for more than forty years.

In July 1970, the executive leadership published a document titled *The Overall Program of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers* in which they stated: "It is clear to is that the development of our struggle based on concrete realities dictates the need for a Black people's liberation political party. We state unequivocally that this must be a Black Marxist-Leninist party..." This pronouncement, which was circulated as an official redefining statement of the direction in which the League was headed as an organization, rather than as an internal discussion paper for debate, led to a fierce ideological struggle inside and outside the League, over the applicability of Marxism-Leninism as a tool of analysis and a method of thought that should be embraced by the Black movement in the United States.

By this time, the activities of the League were noticeably beginning to move further and further away from the shop floors of the auto plants, and the everyday concerns, language and struggles of the men and women on the assembly lines, the most important section of mass organization, in terms of where the organization's power lay as a political force to be reckoned with. Also, very noticeable was the bureaucratic and authoritarian behavior the executive leadership began to increasingly display through what turned out to be unenforceable directives to the central staff and other components of the organization. What was rapidly developing at the executive leadership level was a move away from the concept of *participatory democracy,* the mainstay of any mass organization, and was becoming dominated by intellectuals and bureaucratic type professionals.

The nationalist tendencies inside the League, in particular, severely criticized and attacked the executive leadership of the organization for its retrogression. *Every Cook Can Govern: A Study Of Democracy in Ancient Greece*[45] and Its Meaning for Today, the widely circulated pamphlet by James was often invoked to state the nationalist tendencies' case.

With respect to policy-making all of the various components of the League felt that they should have a "say-so," and most of the cadres themselves functioned under the principles that everyone who showed up at any given meeting not only were entitled to voice their opinion during deliberations, but also vote on any matters if no general consensus could

45 C.L.R. James. *Every Cook Can Govern.* (Detroit: Bewick, 1992). [ed.]

be reached and a vote was necessary, to either resolve or clarify policy questions relative to the League's political activities. The League was not a "membership card" organization like the NAACP and political parties. Anyone who participated in any activities of the League could define himself or herself as a member, and would be treated as such, without any obligations being imposed upon them to pay dues, attend meetings, on a regular or set basis. In this regard, the League was not a unique organization, because most community based organizations functioned as "open-to-all" participatory organizations in which a person could "fit-in" where he or she desired or chose in terms of contributing to the development of the organization.

Being apprised of developments with respect to the internal problems the League was faced with, James, characteristically, mapped out a simple strategy during his meeting with key members of the Garvey Institute for exposing and reintroducing various political tendencies within the League to his historical, literary, philosophical and theoretical works. What James specifically proposed is that the Garvey Institute reprint Facing Reality with a new introduction aimed primarily at stimulating the Black Nationalist tendencies inside the League, that were hostile to anything branded Marxism, to read and study his works for the purpose of broadening their perspective, and thinking on the tasks that faced the Black Revolution in the United States.

He also proposed that the Garvey Institute enter into a collaboration with Friends of Facing Reality to jointly reprint *Basic Documents on the Black Struggle*[46] and *Notes on Dialectics.*[47] James deemed these two documents key for (1) countering radical forces inside and outside the League that attacked Black Nationalism on the grounds that from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism it was reactionary and (2) steering the League forces towards a proper understanding of what dialectics as a method of thought was all about and how to correctly apply it as a tool of analysis.

James further proposed that the Marcus Garvey Institute prepare an internal discussion paper on *Organization and Spontaneity: The Theory of the Vanguard Party and It's Application to the Black Movement in the U.S.*

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46 C.L.R. James. *Basic Documents on the Black Struggle.* (Detroit: Facing Reality 1970). [ed.]

47 C.L.R. James. *Notes on Dialectics.* (Detroit: Friends of Facing Reality, 1971). [ed.]

Today. This document was sent to radical Black organizations of all political persuasions for critical comment and debate. Modibo Kadalie, volunteered to undertake this task; and, to everyone's surprise, circulation of this document produced a general consensus throughout the Black movement that the "organizational question" should be debated widely within the context of the applicability or non-applicability of Lenin's theory of the vanguard party, clarifying issues in simple and understandable language, relative to the self-organization of the Black movement in the U.S.

Kadalie did more than just circulate the Garvey Institute's document and poll Black political activists throughout the country. He and Malcolm 2X (Greg Kelley), the person who paid the lion's share of the publication costs, turned the task into an international campaign for a debate, not on Lenin's theory of the vanguard party but on the "dialectical relation of spontaneity and organization." This activity set the stage for a series of lectures James gave in Detroit, Pontiac, Lansing and East Lansing, Michigan.

Both the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Black Panther Party, independent of each other, invited James to come to Detroit to speak on dialectics. There is no record of what occurred or what he said in his discussions with the Panthers, except that he met them at the home of Martin and Jessie Glaberman. There are, however, unpublished transcriptions of two taped lectures James gave in Detroit in 1971 on June 12 and 13. About fifty people attended the first lecture and some seventy people were in attendance for James's second lecture.

Willie Gorman, who chaired the lectures, recalled that James told his audience, "You people did not really invite me here to hear me talk on dialectics. You want to know something else. What is it?" This was James's way of providing the League members an opportunity to seek his counsel and guidance with respect to what they needed to work out and do to stay the course of a genuine Black working class organization. There was no response to James's diplomatic and subtle offer to assist the League, in its struggle to formulate something theoretically that could be integrated into the program of the organization to possibly help prevent its collapse.

James was there for the League, but the executive leadership of the organization was not in tune with him, particularly on the question of the vanguard party and how to embrace and apply Marxist-Leninist thought correctly. Even though he was well aware that the executive leadership of the organization had misguidedly moved to an advocacy of the formation

of a vanguard party, he did not fall prey to criticizing or condemning them or the organization publicly, when he was asked during the question and answer period of his second lecture on *Notes on Dialectics* what his view was in respect to the League.

His response was that: "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers does not say: 'We are a vanguard party. The revolution will be led by us and nobody else. And until you join us and we have sufficient force there will be no revolution or the revolution will fail.' If they say that," James said, "I would be their mortal enemy, but they don't say that."

Some of the members of the audience viewed James's response as an avoidance in terms of taking on the executive leadership of the League in a head-on confrontational way. It was and it was not. The positive and negative was simply lodged together in content and form. That is all.

James's belief was that everyone present could easily read between the lines of his methodical effort to coach the League forces toward an understanding of how to properly study and apply dialectical thought correctly to any given question.

One handicap James had in his attempt to impact the thinking of the League was that he was, without question, the elder statesman of the Black movement as a whole, but he was considered and treated as an *outsider* when it came to developing policies inside the League and an overall program inside the organizational matrix of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Grace Lee and James Boggs, two very well known and respected collaborators of James, who had split with him around 1962,[48] however, were not viewed as such, and wielded considerably more influence in all of the Black radical circles in Detroit. The Boggs were local community activists and organizers. Unlike James, they both were proponents of the formation of a Black vanguard party organization. The pamphlet, *A Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party*[49] by James Boggs was one of the most widely read documents by the radical circles of Detroit, and, undoubtedly, it reinforced the thinking of the executive leadership of the League, as it did other wings of the Black movement, that drifted into the waters of the vanguard party.

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48 C.L.R. James, *Marxism & The Intellectuals.* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1962) [ed.]

49 James Boggs, *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party.* (Philadelphia: Pacesetters, 1969). [ed.]

Another obstacle James was confronted within his efforts to influence the direction in which the League was headed was the entrenchment of *sectarian* politics, characteristic and almost completely unique to Detroit. There were the Trotskyists, the Progressive Labor Party, News and Letters, the Maoists, the Stalinists, the All African People's Party, the Republic of New Africa, The Nation of Islam... This list of organizations and political tendencies can go on and on.

Detroit had become the Mecca of small-group radical politics by the time the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was born. All of these tendencies mentioned tried or did "bore within" the organization, to some degree or another, in an effort to influence its course of development, and, for the historical record, it is imperative to note that each of these tendencies had a minute pull, but very insignificant success, in comparison to James's efforts to steer the League forces into what has and still is continuing to prove to be the correct method of thought.

Ironically, James had more influence over the nationalists and Pan African forces within the League, who were naturally prone to reject his views on the grounds that they were not "black" enough, that they represented "old line white leftist politics."

Actually, there is no irony. None of the nationalist tendencies could dismiss him on any ideological grounds of Black Nationalism because, besides being one of the fathers of the Pan African movement, he, through his intellectual work and political activism, had shaped the grounds for a defense of Black radicalism as living Marxism.

To the point: The nationalist tendencies within the League were generally hostile to anything considered Marxist, on the grounds that it was a white European ideology. James was fundamentally a Marxist in that his method, analysis and thought always upheld the view that the class that really mattered in any society is the working class and peasantry. Many young Black political activists thus perceived him as an exponent of "old white leftist" class line politics. They were wrong! Eighty percent of perception is not reality. Oftentimes, James's political and philosophical point of view were readily accepted as coming from others, who failed to attribute these ideas to James.

The nationalist tendencies were struggling to work themselves out of a Pandora's box, as evidence by Ernie Mkalimoto's thesis on *Revolutionary*

Nationalism and Class Struggle,[50] which advances the position that, for the Black captive nation, "race" exploitation has always superseded class exploitation as a general rule, therefore, within the first stage of struggle, the nation's struggle must supersede the class struggle and all efforts directed internally should be geared towards the building of a vanguard party.

Mkalimoto and his wife were head of the League's bookstore. Both fell prey to the 1971 "Easter Purges," along with Modibo Kadalie, his wife, and others whom the executive board of the League viewed as intellectual threats to their leadership.

Even though James was not a proponent of the captive nation thesis, political activists like Mkalimoto, who subscribed to the tenets of "revolutionary nationalism," had no place to go but to James's writings to be a solid ground when it came to participating in the ideological debates over the question of dialectics.

They had to move away from their narrow perspectives of Black cultural nationalism and radicalism, in all its diverse forms, to continue to be looked upon as an important and necessary militant factor helping shape the politics of the day.

The study of dialectics had become part of the politics of the day in terms of a new, spreading mode of inescapable rhetoric inside the Black movement as a whole. This was a significant and welcome development from the standpoint of the broadening consciousness and thought beyond the incontestable spectacles of race as a legitimate tool of analysis—"a way of seeing"—to a much larger and untapped body of universal knowledge.

When James came to Detroit to specifically deal with this subject, he explained his intervention and the overall intellectual situation that had taken root inside the Black movement in the United States this way:

> Now it is important to study dialectic for this reason. I have been here in Detroit many times. I have spoken on the Black struggle in the USA, I have spoken on Pan-Africanism, I have spoken on the French Revolution, I have spoken in Black Studies. But despite the fact that I have spoken on so many things I have never yet spoken on the method by

50 Ernie Mkalimoto. *Revolutionary Nationalism and the Class Struggle.* (Detroit: Black Star, 1970). [ed.]

> which we can approach these subjects and the method by which I approach them. I think the time has come for me to do that. And it has come to me that it is time to do that first of all because it is time to say things that other people seem to be interested in, and secondly because dialectics has become a topic of the day in the United States.

James cited three examples to press his point. "Stokely [Carmichael] constantly talks about dialectics," he said. "When I ask people what he means by that they say quite often, 'We don't know.' Or some say, 'The dialectic means contradiction.' When I try to get them to explain further it is clear that they do not understand [the] contradiction either. Secondly, there is Angela Davis, who is a well-known expert in dialectics and Hegelianism Kant, and so forth." James further explained: "It is certain that as she makes more of an appeal to the general public, the dialectics is going to become a subject of debate. Furthermore, Huey Newton is constantly talking about the unity of opposites negation of negation—he is constantly using the dialectical terms. That means, as usual, it is not surprising that it is among Black people" continued James, "that this process of finding a way of thinking that is separate from the way the bourgeoisie think, or even the liberals think, is taking place among those who are leading the Black movement, the most advanced movement in the United States today.

Before delivering these explanatory remarks, James made it absolutely clear that he had not come to Detroit to teach anyone dialectics. "Nobody could do that in twenty years," James said. "I am trying to introduce you to a book in which the subject is taken up in great detail... *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel and Marxism*, that I myself wrote."

What transpired after James came to Detroit and delivered his two mentally taxing lectures on dialectics is most interesting. The nationalist tendencies began to read and study James's work, *Notes on Dialectics* which at the time was only available in mimeograph form. This had an impact on changing the course of consciousness because it produced a sound intellectual rejection of Stalin's writings on dialectics, which had been mandated, as required reading, by the executive leadership of the League.

Under the direct influence of Modibo Kadalie, some of the Black na-

tionalist forces based in the Highland Park area of Detroit formed their own study group on Notes on Dialectics and asked Willie Gorman, James's long time comrade and collaborator, to chair the study group. Something else also happened. A new and more wide spread interest in James's writings were set in motion. Even members of the Boggs' study group, who were generally prone to be anti-James, began to seek out his writings and enter into friendly debates on a regular basis at the home of Berlinda and Gary Good, where what could best be described as the C.L.R. James tendency inside the League gathered regularly, to engage in political discussion and social activities which always involved cooking and eating food. On these occasions differences of opinion and ideological conflict took a back seat to working out practical approaches to implementing programs that everyone had agreed to under the framework of unity, consensus, and collaboration.

If James had been based at a university in Detroit rather than at Federal City College in Washington, DC, perhaps his influence would have been greater, with respect to steering the youthful forces of the League back to an understanding of how the organization evolved and what the central doctrines were which made the League of Revolutionary Black Workers a political force to be reckoned with.

THE NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE LESSONS

As an organization, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers expanded rapidly from the point of its conception. The organization set up a bookstore, print shop, and film-making center. John Watson, one of its leaders, became the editor of *The South End*, Wayne State University's student newspaper, and literally made the organ an appendage of the League, supplementing the *Inner City Voice*. The League also had a book club, which met monthly. Sometimes there were as many as five hundred persons in attendance, most of whom were always young white middle class professionals from suburban Detroit. All of these things, and the fleet of facilities which the League operated, had to be managed along with the other organizational departments that were set up.

The League forces dissipated in all sorts of directions. James Foreman, for example, was a member of the organization's executive board, but most of his energies went into the Black Economic Development Conference whose activities were mainly devoted to demanding that white Christian

churches and synagogues make reparations to the Black community in the form of hefty monetary contributions, which were partially funneled into components of the League to finance projects. Some of the leadership of the organization got involved in the creation of the Black Workers Congress in 1970, which advocated union reform through caucuses.[51] Also, a number of the sub-leaders and cadres got heavily involved in all sorts of governmentally-funded community action programs. In and of themselves, these things are not negatives. What makes them negatives is that the executive leadership, and many of the cadres of the League, lost sight of what James often taught about dialectics, as he quoted Hegel's *Science of Logic:*

> The man who will do something great must learn, as Goethe says, to limit himself. The man who, on the contrary, would do everything, really would do nothing and fails. There is a host of interesting things in the world: Spanish, poetry, chemistry, politics, and music are all very interesting, and if anyone takes an interest in them we need not find fault. But for a person in a given situation to accomplish anything, he must stick to one definite point, and not dissipate his forces in many directions.[52]

The League clearly over extended itself into too many activities which is a natural tendency of mass organization. But this in and of itself was not what brought about the demise and rapid collapse of the League. Neither did the internal ideological battles and debates which led to the "Easter Purges" in 1971. The ideological struggles which occurred inside the League were a necessary war of ideas over the direction in which the organization should head, in terms of working out a political agenda or

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51 See Black Workers Congress, *The Manifesto of the Black Workers Congress.* (Detroit: BWC, 1971); Black Workers Congress, *The Black Liberation Struggle, the Black Workers Congress, and Proletarian Revolution.* (Detroit: BWC, 1973). For a concise recollection of Forman's engagement with the LRBW, the BWC, and the Black Manifesto reparations campaign, see James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries.* Illustrated Edition. (Seattle: University of Washington, 1995) 543-550. [ed.]

52 This is Part VI, sec 81 of G.W.F. Hegel. *The Science of Logic.* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2010. [ed.]

course of action to advance the movement which Black auto workers in Detroit had initiated.

The organization's leadership were indisputably first class organizers and nontraditional politicians. But, they had very little theoretical knowledge and work under their belts to guide them along the way as they attempted to embrace Marxism as a scientific method of analysis. They clearly did not understand that to attempt to transform the Leauge into a Lenninist style vanguard party was much more than a mistake. It was an impossibility—and illogical course.

At its conception, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers had its own central doctrines, which were articulated through the organization's actions. First, only the people at the point of production could effectively take on the establishment. Second, unions had outlived their usefulness and they could not be reformed. Third, the demand for community control of neighborhoods, schools, the police, etc. must be extended to make community control of the labor bureaucracy the central focus. These were doctrines beyond civil rights and "Black Power" as an all encompassing general political banner. They were revolutionary doctrines to the core of simple insight and understanding into the contradictions of American society and capitalism. They cemented Detroit's reputation as "the heart of the Black Revolution."

For the first time, and after raising the issues of community control in accordance with the demands of the objective situation, could the Black community assert—both from inside the factory and community-wide—an intervention into that old business institution known as the trade union? No one was prepared for this critical leap in consciousness, which the formation of the LRBW signaled.

The League was put in a position to fill a particularly problematic gap with respect to labor and its traditional loyalties to the Democratic Party apparatuses, including even the ties of many Black politicians to the Democratic Party. Specifically, the American Labor Movement played no significant role in the Civil Rights movement and the student rebellions; and, it was only beginning to come out on the issue of the Vietnam War when Walter Reuther died. The League, as an independant Black working class organization calling into absolute question every American institution, thus, stood alone from the very beginning of its existance.

The League challenged the union and corporate establishment, the

international arena was part of the incalculable pull of Professor James's influence and the revolutionary currents of the time.

By 1971, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was in total disintegration from the weight of so many different responsibilities it carried on its shoulders as an organization. The uncrystallized mixture of Black Nationalism, generational revolt, determination to destroy the Black ghetto as America's Berlin Wall and Apartheid system, the flight of individual middle class Blacks from the inner-city, all weighed like a nightmare on the shoulders of the League. These were the magnetic forces that tended to diffuse and distract the organization from a Detroit Black working class point of view.

However short-lived and inconclusive the League was, it was an authentic and genuine Black working class organization, solid for a class solution not tied to any party or subordinate to any bureaucracy. It was not dependent on conventional results, not satisfied with the characterization of Black people as a large undifferentiated mass, etc.

The League was truly an independent outgrowth of the self-movement and self-organization of Black workers in Detroit. Many influences were upon it, none more important for analysis than the influence of Professor James.

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be evaluated in that manner from 1965 to 1977. In its newspaper *The Vanguard,* the union published critiques of state capitalism, defended workers' rebellions in Russia and Eastern Europe, encouraged army mutiny, advocated insurrection against police brutality, and suggested a welfare state could be an oppressive force in contrast to workers self-management. It did all this while promoting solidarity with Africa, Asia, African Americans, and advocating Caribbean federation. In the late 1980s and early 1990s it still had a lively publication, though the union's politics has been less insurgent for some time. *The Vanguard,* at its most militant, was edited by Wally Look Lai (before) and Bukka Rennie after the prominence of the New Beginning Movement (1971-1979) they led together with Franklyn Harvey. The writings of NBM were influential for both Kimathi Mohammed and Modibo Kadalie.

AFTERWORD

C.L.R. James and Kimathi Mohammed's Circle of Black Power Activists in Michigan

Kimathi Mohammed (born Stanley McClinton) deserves to be unveiled from obscurity and recognized as a significant radical political theorist within the Black freedom movement of the early 1970s. A native of Savannah, Georgia, he was a student activist at Michigan State University, and developed a long-term political base in the city of Lansing, Michigan with the Marcus Garvey Institute. Kimathi Mohammed's circle placed forward their perspectives and proposals through publications such as *West Side News*, *Mazungumzo, The Insurrection,* and *The New World.*

The small book, *Organization & Spontaneity* (including here for the first time his essay "Beyond Measure" about C.L.R. James and the Detroit based League of Revolutionary Black Workers), reveals a remarkable intellectual legacy, which must be reconsidered as future liberation struggles strive to break with the post-civil rights, post-colonial condition. Mohammed's radical political thought was original in that, unlike more prominent scholars and activists who have been recorded by history as dynamically shaping the Black Power movement, he anticipated the future course of Black liberation as a rupture with dominant theories and organizational strategies not merely among conventional political scientists, historians, and the Anglo-American Left, but amidst prominent and respected Black radicals as well.

Stokely Carmichael and Amiri Baraka challenged the intersection of white supremacy and empire by calling into question concepts of culture, civilization, and merit that asked people of color to define their path to self-government on the terms of their oppressors. Likewise, Huey Newton, James Boggs, Angela Davis, George Jackson, James Forman, Earl Ofari, and Robert Allen in various ways challenged the Black Power movement to center class struggle and criticisms of capitalism. However, by 1972 the decline of this critical discourse found figures like Roy Innis, James Brown, Tony Brown, Joseph Lowery, Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan, and later Al Sharpton establishing Black capitalism as the only imaginable framework for Black Power. It was not recognized by most that organizational conceptions in the Black Power movement were remarkably similar

despite ideological disputes among personalities and factions. While one grouping might have appeared to base itself on the Black middle class, another on the Black working class, and another on the Black unemployed, the ultimate move to electoral politics among almost all these formations clarified the thin nature of disputes regarding which class would lead the Black freedom movement. All ideological debate became enmeshed in the shadow of state power. These electoral strategies did not embody merely a consolidation of the enforcement of Black voting rights, but they also reflected African American ascendancy into ethnic patronage politics.

Whether candidates for office won or lost, Black Power was increasingly understood as a minority business loan, a government contract, or a professional appointment for the Black middle class. Equal opportunity in government to manage Black working and unemployed people overlapped into the corporate sector. Attaining these positions was not a special "corruption" or a "shakedown," but was rather the avenue by which all aspiring middle-classes politically and economically advanced in the United States, choosing possessive individualism over solidarity with the oppressed.

Where white politicians and capitalists had previously elevated themselves at the expense of people of color, the middle-classes of color were now discarding the marginalized working classes of color in exchange for a piece of the action under the terms of capitalism and the state. This was not clear to many because criticisms of white privilege seemed to call for the endorsement of any African American political strategy, no matter how conservative, in the name of a historically oppressed people's self-determination. During the Black Power era, "Conservative" did not mean choosing the Republicans instead of the Democrats; it meant choosing either party at the expense of revolutionary political action. This is crucial to understanding the genealogy of the Age of Obama and the historical moment of Kimathi Mohammed.

Mohammed's creative interpretation of the larger meaning of the Detroit based Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) may be difficult for some to appreciate now. From 1969-1971 a major section of the Black Power movement was speaking in terms of Black workers taking the lead. However, it was difficult to assess what this meant exactly. Advocates of class struggle and cultural nationalism would clash in epic debates through

1974-1975, by which time even the most prominent cultural nationalists (Stokely Carmichael, Ron Karenga, and Amiri Baraka) acknowledged their debts to Marxism, while still rejecting much of the Anglo-American Left. Mohammed, however, transcended these thin conceptions of race, class, and colonialism and began to argue that the self-activity and self-organization of Black working people exposed an authoritarian tendency within the Black liberation struggle itself: the pervasive desire to build an African American vanguard party revealed contempt for the creative self-governing qualities among the Black masses.

THE MARCUS GARVEY INSTITUTE

The origins of the Marcus Garvey Institute must be understood as the development of an independent freedom school, which for a time produced the Malcolm X Skills Academy—a result of student revolt from 1969 to 1971 on the campus of Michigan State University in Lansing, Michigan, which spilled over to the predominantly Black working class community on Lansing's segregated west side. Lansing, the capital city of Michigan, was chronicled in the student and local press of this period as the racist location of Malcolm X's childhood.[1] In 1971, a dynamic and charismatic student from Savannah Georgia named Stanley McClinton emerged here as a draft dodger who was arrested for his protest by the FBI.[2] Taking on the name Kimathi Mohammed, he became part of a Black Studies movement that condemned the African Studies program at Michigan State as

1 In a Black History Week display at Michigan State University a quote from Malcolm's *Autobiography* was posted that read: "When we lived in Lansing, Michigan, I remember being suddenly snatched awake into a frightening confusion of pistol shots, smoke and flames. Two white men had set fire to our house." See *Michigan State News*. Welcome Week edition. (September 1969). C10. Also see "Things Malcolm Had To Say." *Westside News*. February 14 1970. 7. On East Lansing: "In these days Negroes weren't allowed after dark in East Lansing proper. That's where Michigan State University is located...East Lansing harassed us so much we had to move again."

2 "BLFI Man Arrested For Draft Law Violation," *Michigan State News*. February 16, 1971. 1; Veronica Carter. "BLFI Leader Arraigned." *Michigan State News*. (February 18 1971) 1.

State Department oriented, and suggested that the community must control the African Studies Center.[3]

Mohammed also mentored high school strikes against racial inequality and harassment such as the revolt at J.W. Sexton High School.[4] Often he propagandized with a collective called Black Liberation Front International (BLFI), which included Chui Karega, Terry "Abdul" Johnson, Mike Hudson, and Sam Riddle, who later became a prominent political consultant in Detroit electoral politics. The BLFI had its own stenciled and mimeographed journal and placed manifestos, often in coalition with the Pan-African Student Organization, in the local Black press. [5]

Tony Martin, the later prominent Marcus Garvey scholar, was in the Black Student Union with Mohammed.[6] Maina wa Kinyatti, the later controversial Mau Mau scholar and future political prisoner from Kenya who led the Pan African Student Organization, was also part of the student activist scene at that time as a graduate student and was very close with Mohammed. Together with others they produced a remarkable Pan-African journal *Mazungumzo*, which means "conversation" or "dialogue" in Kiswahili. With regular features by Mohammed, Martin, and Kinyatti, they wielded significant historical and philosophical writings and posed bold intellectual challenges to their professors. The global ideas of Issa Shivji, Walter Rodney, Yoweri Museveni, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Rosie Douglas, Chui Karega, Kofi Natambu, Karim Hirji, Bill Riviere, and Julius Nyerere could also be found in these pages—as well as the words of prisoners from the education program C.L.R. James taught in at Lorton Reformatory in Virginia. [7]

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3 Jeanne Saddler, "BLF Protests at Africa Center." *Michigan State News.* (October 17, 1969) 3; Jeanne Saddler, "BLF Pickets Afro-Studies Center." *West Side News.* (November 29, 1969) 1; Jeanne Saddler, "Black Groups Propose Center Re-Organization." *Michigan State News.* (November 10, 1969) 1.

4 Oba Chiru, "54 Students Arrested at J.W. Sexton." February 20, 1971. 1; "200 Black Students Take Over J. W. Sexton." *Westside News.* (February 20, 1971) 4.

5 "BLFI Issues Manifeso-Proposal." *Westside News.* (November 8, 1969) 5; "PASOA-BLF Issues Second Manifesto." *The Westside News.* (January 15, 1970) 2; Black Liberation Front, *The Insurrection.* 1.1 (1971)

6 See Tony Martin, " 'Black Power' Exists in England Too." *The West Side News.* (December 12, 1969) 2.

7 See for example: Tony Martin, "On African History As Ideological Repression." *Mazungumzo.* 2.2 (Winter 1971) 1-7 and Tony Martin. "George Padmore As A Prototype of the Black Historian in the Age of Militancy." *Mazungumzo* 2.2

For a time the Lansing circle overlapped with activist networks in Detroit, experiments in communal living in Pontiac, and had a long distance relationships with Jimmy Garrett's and Charlie Cobb's Center for Black Education, and with Tony Ferguson's and Valerie Andrew's Caribbean Unity Conference in Washington, DC. These organizations were central to organizing the Sixth Pan African Congress in Julius Nyerere's Tanzania in 1974. Kimathi Mohammed's circle participated in conferences in Washington DC, placing them in conversation with Caribbean radicals Walter Rodney, Wally Look Lai, and Joseph Edwards in 1972 and 1973. C.L.R. James, who taught college classes at Howard University and Federal City College (now the University of the District of Columbia), bound this network of activists together. Detroit was the site of his political organization, the Facing Reality Group, led by Martin Glaberman, a comrade of C.L.R. James.

C.L.R. JAMES ON THE MEANING OF BLACK POWER AND BLACK STUDIES

Chronicled in *West Side News*, a newspaper edited by young protégés of Kimathi Mohammed, and led by Greg "Malcolm 2X" Kelley, C.L.R. James spoke at least twice in two Lansing area and campus forums, and would often visit with Professor James Hooker at Michigan State, still the lone biographer of his friend George Padmore. The headline of *West Side News* on 30 May 1970 reported: "Black Historian Explains Black Studies Meaning." C.L.R. James explained that "Black Studies should not be understood as a concession made to Black students" but "essential for proper knowledge of Western civilization." He pointed out that no other university studies have ever been the subject of such popular interest. Further-

(Winter, 1971) 35-42; Maina wa Kinyatti. "African History and the Western Scholar." *Mazungumzo.* 2.2 (Winter 1971) 7-21; Maina wa Kinyatti. "The Pitfalls of White Liberal Africanists." 3.2 (Winter 1972) 7-11; Maina wa Kinyatti and Kimathi Mohammed. "African Intellectuals: A New Definition." 2.2 (Winter 1971) 43-49; Chui Karega. "Interview with Rosie Douglass.; Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. "The Rational Choice." *Mazungumzo.* 3.3 (1973) 8-16; Walter Rodney. "Tanzanian Ujamaa As Scientific Socialism." *Mazungumzo.* 17-34; Bill Riviere. "West Indian History in the Service of Decolonisation." *Mazungumzo.* 3.3 (1973) 47-50; Kofi Natambu. "National Consciousness and Pan-Africanism." 2.1 (November 1971) 60-65; Issa Shivji's *The Silent Class Struggle* was reprinted in its entirety in the 1972 issue. See Y. Museveni. "On the Silent Class Struggle." 3.2 (1972) 116-120. This is not included in the original publication.

more, in speaking about Africa he suggested a shift away from focusing on civilizations distinguished by bureaucratic state structures like Songhay of West Africa in the early 15th to the late 16th century, and toward an appreciation of the "hospitality" to be found in "village life."[8]

In another speech on 24 October 1970 in Lansing, it was reported that James rated "Black Power" as one of the greatest political slogans of world history, on the level of anything Lincoln, Jefferson, Rousseau, or Marx ever suggested. He reminded his audience that Black Power, properly understood, places African American identity in an international context of the Third World and suggests a complete overturning of the existing regime. James also said the notion makes no sense if it doesn't mean power to the common people. He implored his audience to tell "people who are fighting the police" "where they are going."[9] Thus, it was out of these activist and educational experiences in Lansing, that an alliance was forged between C.L.R. James, Kimathi Mohammed, and the Marcus Garvey Institute.

MOHAMMED'S CRITIQUE OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

It appears C.L.R. James encouraged the preparation of an internal discussion paper by Kimathi Mohammed and the Marcus Garvey Institute. *Organization and Spontaneity: The Theory of the Vanguard Party and Its Application to the Black Movement in the U.S. Today* was a historical and philosophical document that spearheaded a general consensus. The "organizational question" in the Black liberation movement began to be debated with a renewed vigor, contextualized within the relevance of Lenin's theory of the vanguard party to the self-activity and self-mobilization of the Black liberation struggle. The Jamesian view, as put forward by Kimathi Mohammed, was that the vanguard party was not a compelling model for advancing the Black struggle. Mohammed offered a critique of Huey Newton's Black Panther Party (BPP) and its premise to be in the forefront of insurgency among the Black masses. Certainly, the Panthers were the most prominent political formation of their time, and the League was far less impactful nationally, but Mohammed argued that there was evidence that the Black community needed no vanguard. The community's self-

8 "Black Historian C.L.R. James Explains the Meaning of Black Studies." *Westside News.* (May 30, 1970) 1.

9 Karen Fitzgerald. "Historian Talks on 'Black Power.'" *Westside News.* (October 24, 1970) 1.

mobilization in defense of Panther political prisoners, participation in direct-action copwatch programs, and fighting the National Guard to a stand-still in Watts, Cleveland, Detroit, Newark, New York, and Washington, DC, from 1964 to1968, proved the political autonomy of ordinary Black people. This illustrated, in fact, that the BPP was dependent on the self-organization of Black people.

MOHAMMED'S CRITIQUE OF THE LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARY BLACK WORKERS

Mohammed's critique of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers charged that while the League was initially focused on coordinating wildcat strikes by Black workers at the point of industrial production, it nevertheless aspired to evolve from a relatively loose network of workers into a centralized vanguard party. The League began to take up various community education and organization projects, which revealed that it did not understand fully the value of being rooted among Black labor's workplaces and neighborhoods. This did not mean merely living in Detroit, but rather it meant being able to recognize and record the power of Black working people's independent labor actions as the *politics* of these communities.

In 1970, John Watson, a League cadre, advocated the power of a general strike as synonymous with Black Power in the documentary film *Finally Got the News*. A general strike among African American industrial workers suggested that, beyond local grievances over wages and workplace conditions, if these toilers could federate their labor actions, they could actually directly govern the city of Detroit. Additionally, there was at the time a general awareness of C.L.R. James's political assertion that labor must oppose both management and trade union hierarchy. However, the fact remains that the major leaders of the League were far more influenced by Maoism, Stalinism, and social democracy than by the direct democracy or workers' self-management of James's political thought. They opposed trade union hierarchy and management as both racist and capitalist, but confusingly called for more people of color in both bureaucracies, and were inconsistent in their opposition to aspiring rulers above society, which was in harmony with dominant trends in Third World Marxism at the time. So, while League cadre met with James and held study groups with C.L.R.'s past and present comrades James Boggs, Grace Lee, George

Rawick, Martin Glaberman, and Willie Gorman, James's influence on the League was more wishful thinking projected on to it, by those who wished to see a more proletarian Black Power formation transcend the popularity of the Black Panther Party. The nexus of Kimathi Mohammed and Modibo Kadalie (who was for a time on the central staff of the League) was perhaps the most influential faction that insisted on recognizing and recording working class self-activity and saw this as counter to the rising call for a Black vanguard party—even if Mohammmed's perspective never approached direct democracy and workers self-management in full.

FROM *FACING REALITY* TO THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION

In a new introduction to C.L.R. James's *Facing Reality*, republished by the Marcus Garvey Institute and other friends of the Facing Reality group, Mohammed reminded readers to consider how young Pan-Africanists like themselves could relate to a Black Marxist like James. Mohammed explained that what most don't understand about the generation of Black youth of the late 1960s and early 1970s was that they were "instinctively hostile toward bourgeois society and not toward individuals identified as Black Marxists."[10] It did not matter that these activist forerunners were affiliated with the Communist Party, Socialist Party, the Leon Trotsky movement, or wherever they studied Marxism in some part in their lives. W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, like C.L.R. James, were respected for their contributions to the advancement of the Black freedom movement, regardless of their particular political affiliations.[11]

Mohammed, in his critique of the vanguard party and the welfare state, knew of distinctions among socialist political thought (whether advocated by whites or people of color). While he genuinely admired those who helped situate James within the Black radical tradition, in fact he was

10 See C.L.R. James et al., *Facing Reality.* Introducted by Kimathi Mohammed. (Detroit: Friends of Facing Reality 1970).

11 This was a formulation that borrowed from James's outline of Pan African political thought – "From DuBois to Fanon." See C.L.R. James. *From Du Bois to Fanon.* (Lansing: Black Liberation Front International, 1970). This was the Kimathi Mohammed circle's first publishing collaboration with James. It contained a transcript of a speech James gave in Detroit in 1967 that charismatically outlined the Black radical tradition for the first time in a way scholars would subsequently refer to. See Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism.* (London: Zed Press, 1983).

strategically placing James within this tradition for an audience who often saw class struggle and race-first ideologies as being in conflict.

Mohammed let his audience of Black activists know that *Facing Reality* was a classic of socialist political thought and that the methods James used would help them transcend the confused political discussions of his generation. He demonstrated that James would help Black activists recognize how state power and capitalism were in the process of reconfiguring themselves away from a character of crisis and were transitioning out of the Civil Rights era toward an ethnically plural—but still exploitative—regime. To James, the self-activity of ordinary Black people suggested a greater potential avenue for liberation.

Mohammed tried to highlight the development of workers' councils in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution as one means by which James destroyed most socialists' view of the vanguard party. He quickly added that James did not speak merely of developments in Hungary but also in France, Poland, Ghana, and China, as well as among African Americans. Mohammed focused on the matter that whoever fails on the historical question of African Americans likewise fails on all contemporary political questions. He tried to show that James was just as much speaking about the Black freedom movement when he spoke of "the self-confessed bankruptcy of official society." Furthermore, he tried to show that the new society existed in embryo but that in order for it to be brought into fruition, ordinary people must know how to bring it closer.

Mohammed argued that if one examines developments over the decade leading up to 1970 (including Robert Williams, Stokely Carmichael, the emergence of the Black Panther Party, the emergence of Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, and the Arusha Declaration in Julius Nyerere's Tanzania—he did not speak of Dr. Martin Luther King) one should see not defeat, but rather the new society trying to be born. For Mohammed these events did not show that the spontaneous character of mass rebellion was in any way "unorganized." In fact, he felt such a premise was "ridiculous," and that these events signified that the Black masses' elemental drive toward self-emancipation was not only the harbinger of the new society, but in fact *was* the new society itself.

THE PROBLEM OF MOHAMMED'S LENINISM

For the reader, Kimathi Mohammed's Leninism often creates certain problems in understanding his political orientation toward the self-activity of the Black masses. In *Organization and Spontaneity,* there is an extensive discourse on Lenin and the vanguard party. It is clearly a meditation on C.L.R. James's interpretation, which was that the vanguard party was not a special or central doctrine of Lenin's political thought. Mohammed appears to believe, like James, that Lenin should be remembered as someone who observed the popular self-activity of ordinary people very closely. It is inescapable that he was trying to pose a debate among Black radicals and the American Left about the real meaning of the canonical texts of Marxist revolutionary heritage. Unfortunately, this proved a restraint on Mohammed's creativity.

At times, a close reading of *Organization and Spontaneity* reveals a peculiar lack of clarity on what type of revolutionary organization Mohammed preferred. Following the example of C.L.R. James's *Facing Reality,* Mohammed seems to suggest such an organization should merely recognize and record the Black working class's self-activity, but toward what end is he advocating this?

There is nothing wrong with debating internal dynamics that plague political parties in general. The problem arises when these parties are seen as electoral vehicles or vehicles of a one-party state. This can mask the reality that internal debates during which the masses are often the object of discussion cannot also include the masses as equals. Occasionally, under the guise of "participation," the masses can appear to be included as subordinates. This is what became of the Panthers and the League. In certain respects, Mohammed was able to overcome this inconsistency through his critique, but not completely.

Kimathi Mohammed, who was from a humble working class background in the American South, and a descendant of African slaves, spoke of the need for revolutionaries to have a mass base. This could imply that these revolutionaries were not working class themselves or that they saw the masses as a separate entity from themselves. Here, it is unclear whether or not Mohammed's orientation towards the direct self-mobilization of the Black working class is meant to operate in an advisory role for those who see themselves as potentially interfacing with state power. A discussion of Leninist vanguard parties as being opposed to the potential

of workers' self-management is markedly incomplete when it excludes a critique of state power. In underscoring the incorrect application of Lenin's organizational theories, he seems to accept that there can be valuable conclusions drawn from Lenin for a perspective of a society distinguished by workers self-management, or at least that Lenin revealed some eternal truth about the relationship of spontaneity and organization.

Mohammed seems to forget that while Lenin recognized working people's capabilities as insurgents in street battles with police and as initiators of strikes, he never conceived them as able to organize themselves what was required to consolidate a new society. Mohammed's Lenin is later a critic of bureaucratic deformities within the state he led, but holds no permanent attitude toward centralization or decentralization, though he supposedly always "confided in the working class."

In this way, Mohammed's presentation is blemished. From the seat of state power, Lenin's supposed close observations of working class self-activity only served to aid in the brutal suppression of its independent labor action and self-governing capacities. Widespread ignorance or censorship of these facts is pervasive among the American Left and International Left, regardless of race or nationality. It is particularly important here to underline that a Black autonomous project which critiques vanguard party notions cannot be simply received as a critique of unnecessary hierarchy in political parties. Neither, can the project appear to suggest that radical political parties, which are more decentralized in their internal culture, should merely promote an enhanced welfare state, or, help establish a one-party state with a ruling class imaged as progressive. Instead, we have to be clear that it is the task of revolutionary organization to promote direct democracy and workers' self-management as the programmatic completion of the self-governing instincts of ordinary people, and also that these philosophies are irreconcilable with any minority rule regime above society.

Kimathi Mohammed argued that it was valid for revolutionary governments, such as Lenin's, to make decrees where the masses could be mobilized to carry them out. But, as applied to the Black movement, this adds nothing to the viewpoints of Amiri Baraka, Stokely Carmichael, or Huey Newton. For all his creativity, Mohammed nonetheless embraced the Stalinist myth that after Lenin seized state power, the task of implementing workers' councils still remained; the reality was the exact oppo-

site. The independent self-organization of the workers' councils in 1905 and 1917 paved the way for Lenin and the Bolsheviks rise to power. Lenin suppressed self-managing soviets because they were present before and during his consolidation of power.[12] If this logic was applied to the Black movement on a world scale, the Black mayors and congressmen in the United States, and Black leaders in Africa and the Caribbean would be charged with encouraging, at their very best, subordinate participation. They would have to (and did) suppress independent Black workers—as Mohammed's better instincts recognized and understood. In this way, Mohammed's Leninist discourse is an obstruction to the best implications of his theoretical work. This may have been a theoretical path of retreat for the circle around Mohammed, for it became burdened with trying to recognize and record a decline in the independent self-mobilization of Black people. Yet what Mohammed took from C.L.R. James's unique reading of the Hegelian dialectic had more staying power for creative political theory.

THE CREATIVITY OF MOHAMMED'S HEGELIAN DIALECTIC

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers invited C.L.R. James to come to Detroit and speak on dialectics. These two lectures on 12 and 13 June 1971 were recorded and transcribed. About fifty people gathered for the first lecture and some seventy more were present for the second. Separate from viewing these meetings as documentation of tension within the League over the issue of forming a centralized vanguard party, these hidden transcripts of the James archive were an inspiration for Mohammed's methodology. Whether talking about working out "knots," or speaking of James's influence on the League as "beyond measure," Kimathi Moham-

12 For furthering reading on Lenin's suppression of the Soviets in the Russian Revolution, and a critique of C.L.R. James's perspective on Lenin see Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-1921: State and Counter-Revolution.* Foreword by Andrew Zonneveld. (Atlanta: On Our Own Authority! Publishing, 2012); Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: the Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1921.* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); GP Maximoff. *The Guillotine At Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution.* (Chicago: Cienfugos Press, 1970); Matthew Quest, "Silences on the Suppression of Workers Self-Emancipation: Historical Problems with C.L.R. James's Interpretation of V.I. Lenin." *Insurgent Notes.* Issue 7. October 2012. Online: http://insurgentnotes.com/2012/10/silences-on-the-suppression-of-workers-self-emancipation-historical-problems-with-clr-jamess-interpretation-of-v-i-lenin/

med reveals his debt to a reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and C.L.R. James's *Notes on Dialectics.*

There is still much confusion about the value of dialectics for methodologies of how to think historically and politically. The goal here is not to endorse dialectics as a certifiable form of radical thinking, as many "dialectically" are still unsure if Lenin suppressed the Soviets in the Russian Revolution (or if this was a bad thing or should matter) or whether Barack Obama's presidency is something that should be opposed (as if the White House, and ruling class behind it, all of a sudden transformed itself into another qualitative entity). It would be a mistake to say such confusion is a product of retrogressive political times. Instead, this confusion points to fundamental and unresolved flaws within the heritage of aspiring revolutionary political thought and a decline in our ability to work out new radical ideas and strategies. This is something that a consistent adherence to direct democracy and workers self-management, whatever various strands of Marxism might mean, can contribute to overcoming. In this way, one should not fear the accusation of being an "anarchist" in the face of those who endorse administrators of state and managers of working people as "progressive." Kimathi Mohammed, in his political prime, who like C.L.R. James never saw himself as an anarchist, was nevertheless treated as if his Hegelian-inspired ideas were excessively utopian. But were they?

The creative power of Mohammed's political thought originates in his understanding of C.L.R James's Hegelian dialectics. Importantly, James argues that philosophy must become proletarian, not that philosophy must be brought to the proletariat.[13] James suggests he has no interest, and thought it unproductive to teach popular audiences pure epistemology or the function of categories of cognition. In fact, he says one can think correctly without knowing dialectics;[14] his *Notes on Dialectics* are instead grounded in political concerns. In politics, James asserts, we must be careful not to be stuck in our principles. Politics, or "the organic life of thought forms," must come "out" of contradictions or one's thought is "no good."[15]

13 C.L.R. James. *State Capitalism & World Revolution.* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986) 128-132.

14 C.L.R. James. *Notes on Dialectics.* (Detroit: Friends of Facing Reality, 1971) 27.

15 C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics,* 2 and 40.

If it is a chief error of thought to continue to think in one set of forms, categories or ideas, when the object of our thought and its content have historically and materially moved on, laying the basis for the development of something new; it is a more grave error, James explains, for political analysis.[16] Thus, for James, Hegel's discussion of logic and dialectic was a means to prepare to better observe the evolving material practice of human labor, which was both social and economic. For James, dialectic was not merely that all history moved by contradiction. A method was needed to observe aspects of historical development in freedom struggles.

James rejects the metaphysics Hegel assigns to the mind in his philosophy. But like Marx, he claimed to retain the notion of mind and assigns a new role to it. In the *Phenomenology of Mind,* Hegel suggests that humans create their own world through the process of consciousness and self-realization in thought. James rejects this Hegelian idea and instead believes that humans create their world not out of their mind alone, but with constraints imposed on them by the material world, with partial and limited knowledge, and through struggles against race, class, and gender oppression. But James insists Hegel should not be rejected completely, but his insights should be made concrete. James was an empirical thinker. That is, as Alrick Cambridge has shown, James understood that one makes knowledge concrete by closely observing the practice and experience of ordinary people. He believed true life and politics would unfold through oppositional struggles and be transformed to something other than it was.[17]

James intended to turn the study of Hegel's *Science of Logic* (especially two subsections and certain features—the "Doctrine of Being" and "Doctrine of Essence") into a foundation for meditating on ordinary people's self-activity. He believed he could harness Hegel's categories which generated *negations* and *transitions* from lower-order fragments to higher-order categories of cognition. These could culminate in the unity of theory and practice and freedom for humanity. James has been perceived as an idealist and insufficiently grounded in historical materialism in his approach, but he nevertheless proposed that his converted dialectic (which he un-

16 *Notes on Dialectics*, 4.

17 Alrick Cambridge. "C.L.R. James: Freedom Through History and Dialectics." In *Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century Caribbean.* Vol. 1 Alistair Hennessy ed. (London: Macmillan, 1992) 175-176.

derscored was consistent with Marx and Lenin's materialist approach to Hegel) could become the most certain method of observing and evaluating the self-organization of working people.[18]

Hegel's Doctrine of Being "deals with things as they are...a straightforward objective analysis of something" which includes quality, quantity or size, and measure or the standard "by which you distinguish them." Of course one must evaluate similar things hot dogs, hats, or people. Yet "people" is too vague a category. One can examine workers or peasants, and in specific sectors of the world economy.[19] "The Doctrine of Essence" is not as easy to grasp as the "Doctrine of Being."

> Essence means that something is always trying to be something [else] but failing to become that, going back to a previous [identities or categories] and starting again. At any given moment the proletarian movement looks like [a previous historical status, event, or form]."[20]

Here, James is trying to demonstrate that when one observes a historical or contemporary movement it is always in motion, striving to be something it is not, in the process of making a leap forward. But sometimes when one stops and looks at it, and tries to be precise about it, the essential movement is represented or *reflected* in the form the historical and political action takes. These reflections may *disappear,* but the essential movement remains. Humans push toward what they know their lives and society must be, fail, and then return to that obstacle or challenge.[21]

Now, often when dialectics are popularly spoken about, "contradictions" are said to be their basis. *Contradiction*, like *identity* and *difference*, can be found in Hegel's "Doctrine of Essence." James points out that most who speak in this way reveal they have not done sufficient work to get past this word and toward the method of evaluating political movements. James contests that contradiction doesn't mean *opposite.*

18 Alrick Cambridge. "Chapter 3," Unpublished Manuscript in Author's Possession. (June 15, 2002) 5-6.

19 C.L.R. James, Unpublished Lecture on Dialectics. (Detroit, Michigan: June 13, 1971) 2-3. In Kimathi Mohammed Papers, Savannah, GA (privately held)

20 *Ibid,* 3.

21 *Ibid,* 3.

Hegel explains that identity emerges when one speaks about the difference between two things. When one establishes an identity of a person or thing, one must establish the specific difference. Now when one pursues that specific difference that is where one finds a contradiction. The "truth" of these two objects consists only in their relation to each other—"each contains the other in its own concept." If one begins to see the difference between father and son, mother and daughter one can then see the relationship between capital and labor—"there can be no proletariat without capital; they're tied up together." For James, the truth of the labor movement can only exist in its relationship to capital. Now, the average person who speaks on dialectics, says James, believes this is *all* that the dialectic means, the contradictory relationships between objects. Instead, he says the real creative thought occurs after we acquire all the facts about a historical social movement. Then, we can *speculate* about the social motion of democratic and working class forces in light of spontaneity and organization.[22]

According to James, we cannot approach contradictions between capital and labor or oppressive systems and conquered people as vulgar material facts of existence. Phenomena do not allow themselves to be dominated by contradictions. Thus we must use our imagination to resolve these contradictions. We must "hold fast" to these contradictions when we speculate about the history of painting, party politics, or the proletariat. This does not mean we hold permanently to contradictions and believe they are fixed material facts. On the contrary, these contradictions are what we pivot on in speculating about future developments.[23]

James explained that another trap aspiring dialecticians fall into is making determinations as external reflections—they evaluate one person or thing as not like the other. Someone might observe that the Russian workers in 1905 and 1917 are not the same as in 1937, or that the Black movement in the United States was not the same in 1955, 1967, and 1972. Perhaps the stage of capitalism that had been reached at the onset of the industrial era was not the same as in the age of automation, cybernation, or the era of the Internet. Likewise, people sometimes evaluate one capitalist politician as not like another. But this is insufficient if one doesn't speculate about the motion and self-organization of everyday people. It

22 *Ibid,* 4.
23 *Ibid,* 4-5.

may appear that the people are not moving at a certain moment—but James's Hegelian dialectic would assert that this is mere appearance. This contradiction must resolve itself in speculative thought about where historical movement will go next. James's lecturing in the Black Power era in Detroit underscored his hope that in the future contradiction would not be spoken of carelessly.

Whether thinking about the nature of the vanguard party or the independent validity of Black autonomous movements, James says that one uses dialectics to speculate about past events, as well as about circumstances as they are being experienced. One meditates on old concepts, unites them with new concepts, and then leaves the old ideas behind. Kimathi Mohammed and his colleagues valued what James concluded in 1948 about the vanguard party and Black autonomous movements, but James taught that "there [was] not much point in seeing [this] when it ha[d] already taken place."[24] James remarked that the dialectic is "something you use, you use it for your study. And I would advise you to pay some attention to the dialectical development of the Black question."

THE NEW WORLD: BLACK POWER, WORKERS' SELF-MANAGEMENT, AND WORLD REVOLUTION

In the fall of 1973, the Marcus Garvey Institute produced a publication called *The New World.* It was an attempt by Kimathi Mohammed's circle to recognize and record the self-movement of ordinary workers at the end of the summer of 1973 and place this in a panorama of global resistance from Chile to France to South Africa. By this time, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers had imploded, though Ken Cockrel was still leading a defense campaign of James Johnson, an autoworker who had killed two foremen after experiencing a series of workplace hassles at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue plant in May 1970. Johnson was perceived as mentally ill and would later win workmen's compensation benefits. The defense committee contended that it was Chrysler that had "pulled the trigger," given the racism and unsafe working conditions Johnson and most African American industrial workers faced.[25]

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24 *Ibid,* 10.

25 Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying.* Updated Edition. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998). See especially "James Johnson: A Prologue" 9-11.

In Chrysler automobile factories, particularly inside the Mack Avenue plant and the Jefferson Avenue plant, Black workers' spontaneous rebellions were still showing the self-managing power of Black labor in Detroit as the essence of Black Power. Protesting the miserable working conditions at the Mack Plant, an estimated 400 workers launched a sit-down strike in Department 9780. It was Kimathi Mohammed's perspective that Progressive Labor Party activists Bill Glibreth and Clinton Smith, who worked in the plant and who played a very important role in this labor action in their fight with factory security guards the morning of the strike, were in a sense a spark to the rebellion, but they did not initiate it. Workers don't just go on strike because a fight breaks out between a worker and plant security. Rather, there was a conscious and disciplined spirit of self-organization breaking out in response to workplace conditions. Here, Black workers embodied the intersection of spontaneity and organization and did not need trade union hierarchies or party politics to cohere their destiny.[26]

When Gilbreth and Smith sent the factory guards to the hospital and the police came in the plant to intervene, these Black workers made a human wall between their fellow laborers and the police barring the cops from the plant. After the police left the factory, a sit-down strike began which shut down the Mack Avenue Plant for two days. On the second day of the strike, the United Autoworkers Union sent a "goon squad" composed of 1,000 union stewards, committeemen, and other officials armed with clubs and other weapons, to violently break up the strike. An anonymous Black worker interviewed by *The New World*, who was fired as a result of this labor action, said the insurgency in the plant was due to unsafe and unhealthy workplace conditions. The plant was littered with unsafe scrap metal and unfinished stock. When it rained, water poured into the plant. Workers would have to wade through water while using heavy machinery which sometimes produced sparks. There was little ventilation in hot weather and the very few fans only circulated hot air and smog. This Black worker assessed the relationship between union committeemen, shop stewards, and management as one of collusion. He also revealed the

26 Kimathi Mohammed. "Conditions Spark Revolt!" *The New World.* (October, 1973) 1,4.

mental and physical strain that Black workers faced in industrial settings of which James Johnson was symbolic.[27]

Isaac Shorter and Larry Carter were Black workers who were part of the successful shut-down of the Jefferson Chrysler Plant in the summer of 1973. The shut-down was a revolt against the racism of Supervisor Tom Woolsey, and he was among the many supervisors pushing and harassing all the workers in pursuit of speeding up the assembly line. These workers recognized that while Tom Woolsey was a racist, the speed-ups were part of the typical foremen's agenda which was in pursuit of profit and was not beneficial to the workers. Following Shorter, Carter, and other militant Black workers during breaks, to the bathroom, and in walks to the plant gate became a routine part of the attempted control of the labor force. The supervisors tried to divide Shorter from his comrades by offering him a "heat pass" or another job on the assembly line, but Shorter did not wish preferential treatment.

Shorter and Carter were carried aloft the shoulders of fellow workers during the labor action of late July 1973. They climbed into the control panel cage of the assembly line and shut down the power without consulting with their union representatives. Workers defensively clustered around the cage with chains, preventing forcible removal. Shorter spoke to the mainstream media about how Black workers could control the city, but the problem was larger than racism: for it was the capitalist system they were up against. However, Akosua Kushindana (Berlinda Good) exposed The *Detroit Free Press* for trying to misrepresent the Shorter and Carter led rebellion as one of irresponsible and unreasonable people.[28]

While all this was going on, Salvador Allende's government was overthrown in Chile by the United States-backed military leader, Augusto Pinochet. Allende represented a mild socialist parliamentary regime and Pinochet would become known as a longtime dictator who repressed and heinously tortured liberation activists. Kofi Natambu concluded that Allende's government, however well-intentioned, was caught between the self-governing workers and the capitalists. There was "class warfare taking place in Chile not merely a changing of the guard" by which was meant

27 "Black Worker Speaks." *The New World.* (October 1973) 2, 4.

28 Akosua Kushindana (Berlinda Good). "Shorter Fired From Plant." *The New World.* (October 1973) 1,4.

the election of Allende.[29] Malcolm Askie (Greg Kelley) reported a wildcat strike at the *Lip* Watch Factory in France. This rebellion of 1,300 workers raised issues of workers' self-management, where independent labor not only seized the products of their work (keeping them as a guarantee of their employment), but also refused government manipulation advocating that they organize themselves into a cooperative under the terms of capitalism. A 10,000 strong solidarity rally outside the plant backed the *Lip* workers.[30] Nbuzi Mtu (Lawton K. Jackson) documented the horrible working conditions in a South African gold mine and the rebellion of miners who demanded higher pay and faced police brutality. Apartheid South Africa's white-led trade unions opposed any support for these Black workers. Black Power activists led protests against the conditions these workers faced at South African embassies. [31]

The journalism of Kimathi Mohammed's activist circle published at the same time as "Organization and Spontaneity" reveal that Black autonomy at this historical moment became a sophisticated vision of workers self-management that rejected white supremacy, empire, and the legitimacy of a progressive ruling class on a global scale. This critique was significant not only when applied to France or Chile, but also in the circle's analysis of trade union response to Black workers' rebellions in Detroit, where union leaders were in collusion with the Democratic Party. Coleman Young, the first African American mayor of Detroit, would be elected the following year, the same year *Organization & Spontaneity* was first published.

REVOLUTIONARY ANSWERS

Both Kimathi Mohammed, in these two essays, and Modibo Kadalie in his introduction to them, have referenced C.L.R. James's famous statement "the Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA." The autonomous Black movement, as explained by James, had "an independent validity." It could intervene in the social and political life of the nation with great vigor, act as a catalyst for "the revolutionary proletariat,"

29 Kofi Natambu. "Class War in Chile." *The New World.* (October 1973) 1,3.

30 Malcolm Askia (Greg Kelley), "Workers Seize Control." *The New World.* (October 1973) 3.

31 Nbuzi Mtu (Lawton K. Jackson), "South African Workers Resist." *The New World.* (October, 1973) 4.

and was a constituent "element of the struggle for socialism."[32] These words by C.L.R. James were an inspiration to many sectors of the Black Power movement, and they appeared to affirm and foreshadow the self-organization and self-emancipation of Black people as independent of the Anglo-American Left. James, it is crucial, did not speak of the Black left or Black revolutionaries as a comparison to parties and leaders of another ethnic or ideological character. Rather, he was discussing the African American masses' instinctive self-organization.

When James's "revolutionary answer" was interpreted in a fashion that did not emphasize the self-organization of ordinary African Americans, but spoke instead of the "independent validity" of the Black movement as a whole, it could mistakenly be assumed that James foreshadowed a perspective that "the proletariat," like the American Left, was heir to a privileged, white identity. This was never James's emphasis. His teachings testify to this, as does the archive of Kimathi Mohammed's circle, the documents of which recognize global labor struggles for self-management, regardless of race and ethnicity and independent of any hierarchical leaders.

During the Age of the CIO, James did not see industrial workers in white terms, but in multi-racial terms. And in the Black Power era, James made clear that, while you could not reconstruct society without "restructuring mental attitudes," it was a mistake in anti-colonial analysis to see the ruling class of an imperialist state and the workers exploited by them as potentially sharing the same values—James punctuated, "I don't accept that."[33] James was not ignoring racism among the American working class, but was reminding us that through shared struggle such obstacles we have placed in our own path to solidarity could be transformed.

Many chastised James, claiming that white workers in the United States could not possibly attain revolutionary consciousness due to their privilege. Some thought they were being "dialectical" in this wooden historical materialist analysis of statistics of racial inequality. James respond-

32 C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA." In *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question.'* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 138-139.

33 Michael Smith, "You Don't Play With Revolution." Interview with C.L.R. James, *McGill Reporter.* (October 11-14, 1968), In *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James.* David Austin, ed. (Oakland: PM Press, 2012) 233-234.

ed in a manner which emphasized that such analysis could not be a basis for revolutionary political perspectives. Where and when in the world had humans strived to emancipate themselves without carrying with them their own racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and incomplete ruptures with capitalism and the state? Nowhere—not in Europe, Africa, Asia, or Latin America, nor in the Caribbean—had this been the case.

Despite his attempt to clarify his thesis, James's "revolutionary answer," created a false impression for many of his admirers. James consistently asserted that Black people were instinctively enemies of the state, capitalism, and imperialism, and that they had an elemental drive for independent politics which rejected ordinary electoral propositions. These were part of valid guidelines by James for *revolutionary* politics, not a permanent statement on the *special* nature of African Americans which might in turn permit a turning away from—or silencing of—revolutionary politics. If African American radical character was a material fact among the masses, and not an interpretive lens for education, agitation, and propaganda, people of color would be God's humanizing agents, a redeemer people. Many well-meaning white liberals and leftists, never having lived among ordinary Black people and often being more mentally damaged then the white conservatives they abhorred, seemed to embrace this notion in their response to the Black freedom movement. Some even theorized "radical" politics in this fashion, and in certain respects this trend continues to the present day.

However, James and Mohammed did not advocate their political opposition to condescending saviors with a footnoted exception for Black people. In fact, they warned against viewing Black History as a means whereby permanent esteem is granted to political leaders for past service, who in one period perhaps contributed to leading a liberation struggle only for them to reveal they define freedom as replacing the former oppressor above society in coveted elite positions.

There is no question that the Black liberation struggle from 1955 to 1972 transformed American, Western, and World Civilization, but James's dialectics, at their best, reminded the reader not to get caught up in political categories when the object of our analysis has probably changed form. This is why Kimathi Mohammed's writings against the vanguard party in the Black freedom movement have lasting value: for the learning and

clarification of revolutionary politics, not valorization of them for past contributions to the liberation of humanity.

The centrality of Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers to Kimathi Mohammed's analysis and his critique of the vanguard idea make it clear which social class within the Black community he saw as leading the Black freedom movement. Yet in James's "revolutionary answer" there is a specific political content to Black autonomy that has unfortunately been discarded. As time has passed, the quality and ambition of Black freedom movements has declined, and those who aspired to enter the rules of hierarchy have since been elevated.

The independent Black freedom movement, in James's view, was autonomous and radical to the extent it rejected identification with imperialist war.[34] On the strength of their own experience, Black people opposed "the shibboleths of bourgeois democracy."[35] According to James, Jim Crow law and suppression of the Black vote affirmed for African Americans a belief that state power could not simultaneously exist above all classes of society and serve all people equally. James acknowledged, however, that many Black people often "did not formulate [this] in Marxist terms."

In response to electoral politics and the dominance of the Democratic and Republican parties, James suggests that African Americans rejected these parties as illegitimate, and were more open than most Americans to truly independent and autonomous politics. James likewise underscores that Blacks know that problems are not solved "by voting, [or] by telegrams to Congress."[36] Without being dependent on the Anglo-American Left (though this certainly did not exclude African American presence in revolutionary multi-racial organizations), this meant striving to formulate a rejection of the nation-state and ruling class in their own manner. The struggle for democratic rights by African Americans posed in embryo the entire "reorganization" of the nation's politics and economics "on socialist foundations."[37]

James also observed that the nature of institutional racism was such that even within the programs of middle-class dominated African American organizations (whether churches, the NAACP, or African Ameri-

34 C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA," 140.
35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.*
37 *Ibid,* 141.

can community media) "in some manner" attempts had to be partially made to ameliorate "the capitalist humiliation" that Black people faced daily. This is a valuable prism for understanding the appeal and reality of President Barack Obama. There was an implication to James's proposition that, despite their own possessive individualism, the aspiring Black middle-class had to "lean" toward the labor movement, toward the needs of Black workers and the unemployed. This was not a statement by James of affirmation or trust in the Black middle classes. Rather that their opportunism—to seek and maintain coveted positions above society and accumulate wealth for themselves—would compel them to attempt to speak on behalf of the oppressed masses.[38]

Embedded within C.L.R. James's *Facing Reality* was another nuanced recognition. African Americans, as militant workers who both aspired to full citizenship rights in the United States and were rising up against capitalism and white supremacy, faced a peculiar dilemma. The militant Black worker had contempt for both management and the trade union hierarchy, but the aspiring citizen of color, usually also a worker, was committed to being "represented in every layer of American society." It was a conflict which saw individualism and collectivism "fused" in the African America psyche.[39]

James theorized his "revolutionary answer" in 1948, and this made a tremendous impression on the later Black Power movement of 1965 to 1975. For many, his writing spoke to a material reality of the age. Twenty years before the urban uprisings of 1964-1968, James observed that there existed among Black people "violent passions far exceeding" the alienation of American capitalism. Indeed, among Black people there was a greater "hatred of bourgeois society and the readiness to destroy it when the opportunity should present itself" then in any other sector of the American public.[40]

As late as 1974, Kimathi Mohammed's writings reveal the truth of James's analysis, but in the more than two decades since the Rodney King Rebellion in Los Angeles (and more specifically in the period following the 2008 election of President Obama) there unfortunately seems to be

38 *Ibid,* 144.
39 C.L.R. James, *Facing Reality.* (Detroit: Bewick, 1974) 75.
40 C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA," 146-147.

little public evidence of any hatred or desire to destroy bourgeois society among the African American masses, with the exception of certain rebellious individuals and small groups. However, according to James and Mohammed, such revolutionary sentiments and accompanying self-organization may disappear and reappear over time, but they are always instinctively present.

Since the election of President Obama, we have seen a widespread hatred for anyone, even among African Americans, who questions the legitimacy of the President of the United States. This phenomenon is not historically new; and Obama does not represent the beginning of this development, but a national culmination of the post-civil rights, post-colonial moment. A similar resentment appeared when the first Black mayors were elected in Detroit, Atlanta, Washington, New Orleans, Chicago, and New York. In each instance, we have cynically been reminded by the forces of the *status quo* that in no other country in the world are historically oppressed minorities elevated into the executive committee of the ruling class and capitalist state power.

Uncritical support for Obama among African Americans is not merely a response to white racist backlash against a Black President (who nevertheless efficiently administers global empire). In the current era there has also been distressingly little rejection of capitalism, empire, and the racial inequality both imply. There have been no significant marches by an African American movement on mayors and police chiefs of color in cities where disproportionate incarceration and police brutality is well known. Likewise, there have been few clashes led by movements of Black mothers, workers, or the unemployed against human resources representatives, banking professionals, or social workers of color, a managerial class that now counts many professional women among its ranks. These administrators of the most oppressed sectors of Black life facilitate the layoffs and foreclosures which stem from the economic crises inherent in the capitalist order. Under such circumstances, revolutionary-minded people must be called upon to discard any outdated categories of political thought which may be warped into avenues of support for these regimes.

Divisions of social class continue to exist within this increasing ethnically plural nation-state power, and within the African American community which largely supports it. A new privileged class of color is being challenged for its own possessive individualism and for its role in margin-

alizing workers and unemployed people of color in this era of deindustrialization and ecological disaster. At the workplace and neighborhood level, one can hear constant defense of these Black politicians, and professional classes above society, that they are *doing the best they can*, and they are better than *the other choices available*—it seems the only choices on people's minds are the political parties, politicians, and the terms of order offered by the state, the ruling class, and its empire of capital. The vision of popular self-management suggested by James's and Mohammed's political thought appears to be lost. Often it seems the consensus today is that the task of independent Black labor is to *work* (if one can find work), not to govern.

With diminishing employment opportunities consistent with the profit motive and accumulation of wealth by Big Business and the state which serves it, maintaining such an uncritical world outlook neglects to fundamentally challenge the enduring and oppressive forces of racism and empire. There *are* other choices available. However, bringing these to fruition requires that African American political thought must reconnect with the revolutionary politics and the ideals of working people's (regardless of race) direct self-governance. Failing in this, we ultimately slip back into white supremacist notions that intersect with middle class conceptions of self-reliance and merit which have historically mutilated large sections of humanity at the bottom of society.

Organization & Spontaneity, in its critique of the Black vanguard party idea within the Black Power movement, remarkably exhibited no endorsement (or even mention) of the vote among African Americans as a meaningful expression of political power. Inquiring how these ideas speak to us today necessitates a political leap forward animated by a philosophy of becoming, a spirit of a new beginning, and a discarding of calcified political categories, regardless of their perceived relevance in earlier periods.

BEYOND THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPIRE

Cynthia Hamilton recalls that in 1970-1971 she was trained by C.L.R. James in Washington, DC to go up to Lansing one summer to teach a class at the Marcus Garvey Institute on *Notes on Dialectics*. She recalls that most young activists in the Black Power movement came to political theory, and imagined themselves as part of intellectual tendencies, after some of their most profound political experiences had passed on. Hamilton recalls

that teaching James's version of dialectics was really about the relationship between direct democracy and revolutionary organization. Those who appreciated James at the time did not totally grasp how his ideas cut against the conventions of established parties, conventional electoral politics, progressivism, or the Left. However, observing how the potential of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers disturbed orthodox sects, Hamilton could begin to see why C.L.R. James's ideas could be so threatening even to those with radical commitments.[41]

Terry "Abdul" Johnson recalled that when C.L.R. James came to Lansing he would not merely have a public speaking event for a day or two but would stay for more like two weeks at a time. James was always teaching about what a small revolutionary organization could accomplish and the art of radical journalism for education, agitation, and propaganda. There was a lot of discussion about dialectics in those days. Just when a young militant began to think they were grasping the Hegelian speculative method as applied to politics, James might discuss Athens, the French Revolution, or the Hungarian Revolt of 1956. This would be difficult for some Black Power activists to retain. Having been in the process of rejecting a Eurocentric world view, James in meeting with them would always insist world revolution had to include more than just the United States or the African World.[42]

James would explain that spontaneous mass mobilizations emerge for a time, pushing toward emancipation. There are sometimes brief historical moments, from a few years or a few days, where they organizationally consolidate themselves and define an epoch. Very often James was pointing to what ordinary people were doing, as they threatened or pushed state power from behind. Then this spark of self-liberating organizational forms would disappear to return again in another period. This could seem quite a mystical and irrational proposition.

How did "direct democracy" materialize for a time in Classical Athens? How did "socialism" surface for a time in the French Revolution of 1789-1793? Did "workers' self-management" really appear for a time in Hungary in 1956? The Black Power movement, as represented by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Black Panther Party, was a mass movement of ordinary people, industrial workers, women, and the

41 Cynthia Hamilton, Interview with Author. Telephone, (August 2006).
42 Terry Johnson. Interview with Author. Telephone. (November, 2012).

unemployed, who took the lead from 1966 to 1972, in dismantling a white supremacist regime in decay. They did not complete the struggle to build a new society.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Black Panther Party, along with the working class and unemployed people who they tried to represent (but whose self-organization took on animated lives of their own), thrashed those who insisted on the idea of equal opportunity to enter the rules of hierarchy and who presented capitalism as somehow empowering to Black people. Then that historical development disappeared. It was not merely institutionalized repression that jailed, killed, and disoriented this current, but these political organizations and personalities also placed obstacles in their own path.

Kimathi Mohammed's critique of the vanguard party and the revitalized centrality he placed on the self-emancipation of ordinary Black people suggested where to look for the new society and how we can bring it closer in our own place and time. Direct democracy and workers' self-management of everyday African Americans will appear again as the forms of freedom and self-government which can most effectively confront the American ruling class, its African American constituent elements, and the misleading reconversion of an explicitly white supremacist regime to an ethnically plural Affirmative Action empire.

— Matthew Quest
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HISTORY/BLACK STUDIES

"It is somewhat disgusting to hear self-styled Black leaders talk about leading the 'unorganized' masses," writes Kimathi Mohammed. "It was the 'unorganized' masses who congregated in the streets, defied curfews, engaged in direct confrontation with the police and military...and unleashed a burning assault upon the property of their oppressors. If the Black masses were unorganized, it definitely didn't appear that they were....All the major rebellions erupted spontaneously and violently—Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Newark and Cleveland in 1967....No one had to tell them what to do; they mobilized and organized themselves and did what had to be done."

Kimathi Mohammed's *Organization & Spontaneity* was originally published in 1974 as a response to key contradictions of the Black freedom movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mohammed was among the most original political theorists of the Black Power era. His work emphasized the self-organization of ordinary African Americans and their liberating, self-directed activism.

This updated edition includes a new introductory essay by Modibo Kadalie, an afterword by Matthew Quest, and Kimathi Mohammed's previously unpublished essay, "Beyond Measure," which explores the influence of C.L.R. James on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

"Kimathi Mohammed's essays represent a creative and brilliant attempt to forge an organizational path for black radical politics, away from the well known limitations of elite vanguardism. His engagements with the work of C.L.R. James, the Black Panther Party and the League of Revolutionary Workers make his contribution a neglected and important part of the history of black radicalism, and of considerable relevance today."

— Aaron Kamugisha, Lecturer in Cultural Studies, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus

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